

**THE IRANIAN EPIC
SHAHNAMEH IN SERILAISED STORIES - KAYAN**

ER. DR. RAMIYAR P. KARANJIA

INTRODUCTION	7
THE KAYANIAN DYNASTY.....	9
1. KING KAE KOBAD	10
The search for a new king :	10
Kobad is coronated :	10
War with Afrasiyab :	10
Pashang requests for peace :	11
Rustam averse to the Treaty :	11
2. KING KAE KAUS	13
KING KAE KAUS AND MAZANDARAN	13
Singers from Mazandaran :	13
Zal is summoned :	13
Zal admonishes King Kae Kaus :	13
King Kae Kaus goes to Mazandaran :	14
Mazandaran prepares for war :	14
Div-e-Sapid spells doom :	14
King Kae Kaus sends for help :	15
Rustam goes to Mazandaran :	15
Rustam passes the ‘Haftkhan’ :	15
King Kae Kaus is freed :	16
A messenger is sent to Mazandaran :	16
Rustam returns :	16
War with Mazandaran :	17
Iran wins the war :	17
KING KAE KAUS AND HAMAVARAN.....	18
King Kae Kaus surveys his kingdom :	18
King Kae Kaus marries Sodabeh :	18
King Kae Kaus is trapped :	19
Turan takes advantage :	19
Rustam to the rescue :	19
King Kae Kaus is freed :	20
KING KAE KAUS AND AFRASIYAB	20
King Kae Kaus seeks Roman help :	20
King Kae Kaus’s victory :	20
KING KAE KAUS ATTEMPTS TO FLY	21
Evil tempt King Kae Kaus :	21
The flight and fall of King Kae Kaus :	21

King Kae Kaus repents :	22
SOHRAB AND RUSTAM.....	22
Gazdam's letter to Kaus :	22
King Kae Kaus sends for Rustam :	22
King Kae Kaus insults Rustam :	23
Rustam's scathing reply :	23
The reconciliation :	23
March towards the fort of Sapid :	24
Death of Zindeh-razam :	24
Sohrab takes stock :	24
Sohrab meets Rustam :	25
Rustam deceives Sohrab :	25
The last duel :	26
Rustam requests for 'Noshdaru' :	27
Sohrab breathes his last :	27
Siyavakhsh's PRINCE SIYAVAKHSH.....	27
mother :	27
The birth of Siyavakhsh :	28
Sodabeh smitten by Siyavakhsh :	28
Sodabeh lures Siyavakhsh :	28
Sodabeh once again traps Siyavakhsh :	29
Sodabeh wrongly accuses Siyavakhsh :	29
Siyavakhsh is declared innocent :	30
A new ploy by Sodabeh :	30
Ordeal by Fire :	30
Siyavakhsh emerges innocent :	31
Siyavakhsh forgives Sodabeh :	31
Afrasiyab declares a war :	31
The two armies meet :	31
Afrasiyab calls for a truce :	32
King Kae Kaus is displeased :	32
Siyavakhsh takes a desperate step :	33
Afrasiyab welcomes Siyavakhsh :	33
Siyavakhsh wins over Afrasiyab :	33
Siyavakhsh marries Ferangez :	34
Intuition about the future :	34
Establishing of Siyavakhsh-gard :	34
Afrasiyab's mind is poisoned :	35
Siyavakhsh instigated :	36
Siyavakhsh falls in the trap :	36
Death of Siyavakhsh :	37
Kae Khushru's birth :	37
Child Kae Khushru and Afrasiyab :	38
Avenging Siyavakhsh's death :	38
War between Iran and Turan :	38
Rustam occupies the throne of Turan:	39
Rustam returns to Iran :	40
Afrasiyab returns to Turan :	40
THE SEARCH FOR KAE KHUSHRU	40
Gudarz dreams of Kae Khushru :	40
Toos sets off in search :	40
Kae Khushru proceeds to Iran :	41
Kae Khushru rides the waters :	41

Kae Khushru reaches Iran :	42
TEST FOR THE NEW KING	42
Toos objects :	42
Fariburz goes to Bahman Dez :	42
Kae Khushru goes to Bahman Dez :	43
Toos apologises to Kae Khushru :	43
3. KING KAE KHUSHRU	43
Kae Khushru is coronated :	43
King Kae Khushru tours his country :	44
WAR WITH TURAN	44
Paladins are assigned tasks :	44
THE EPISODE OF FARUD	45
Toos is appointed commander :	45
Toos attacks Farud :	45
Toos humiliated by Farud :	46
Toos attacks Farud :	46
Tragic end to Farud's life:	46
WARS BETWEEN IRAN AND TURAN	47
Iranian army faces obstacles :	47
Fight with the evil Tazav :	47
Aspenui is taken prisoner :	48
Turanian army attacks :	48
Death of Behram :	49
Iranian army retreats :	49
Iranian army again goes for war :	50
Bazur the Turanian magician :	50
Iranian camp is relocated :	50
King Kae Khushru sends help :	51
Both armies replenished :	51
Arrival of Rostam :	52
Rostam takes on Ashkabus :	52
The end of Kamus :	53
Piran goes to meet Rostam :	53
The war resumes :	54
Turanian army retreats :	55
Fariburz reaches Iran :	55
Rostam proceeds to Turan :	56
Afrasiyab prepares a defense :	56
Afrasiyab calls Puladvand :	56
Iranian army wins again :	57
Rostam fights Akvan dev :	57
THE EPISODE OF BIZAN	57
The menace of wild boars :	58
Bizan sets off for Armani :	58
Gurgin plays foul :	58
Bizan meets Manizeh :	59
Bizan is carried away to Turan :	59
Bizan is imprisoned :	60
Gurgin returns to Iran :	60

Bizan's whereabouts are ascertained :	61
Rustam to the rescue :	62
Manizeh meets Rustam :	62
Manizeh returns disappointed :	63
Rustam rescues Bizan :	63
A happy ending to the story :	64
WARS ERUPT AGAIN.....	64
Afrasiyab prepares for war :	64
Kae Khushru plans a defense :	64
Confrontation between the two armies:	65
Homan attacks the Iranians :	65
Bizan takes on Homan :	66
Homan is killed :	66
Requests for reinforcements :	66
Piran asks for truce :	67
Fresh preparations for war :	67
'Battle of Yazdarokh (eleven)' :	68
Turanian warriors defeated :	68
End of Piran :	68
Turanian camp in grief :	69
Bizan goes to help Gastaham :	69
End of Lahhak and Frashivard :	70
Iranian king reaches the camp :	71
The king saves Gastaham's life :	71
Another attack on Turan :	71
Afrasiyab starts preparations :	72
Confrontation :	72
BEGINNING OF THE END FOR AFRASIYAB	73
Death of Kae Kaus :	81
Jehan is made the king of Turan :	81
A UNIQUE END TO KAE KHUSHRU'S REIGN	82
King Kae Khushru goes in seclusion :	82
The warriors are puzzled :	82
Giv seeks Rustam's help :	82
The second seclusion :	82
The third seclusion :	83
Zal and Rustam reach Iran :	83
Zal understands his king :	83
The final farewell :	84
Lohrasp, the successor :	84
Kae Khushru's final journey :	85
Five warriors perish :	86
4. LOHRASP KING.....	86
Lohrasp ascends the throne :	86
Gushtasp leaves Iran :	86
Zarir brings Gushtasp back :	87
Gushtasp leaves Iran again :	87
GUSTASP GOES TO ROME.....	87
Gushtasp arrives in Rome :	87
The prince is jobless :	87

Gushtasp weds Katabun :	88
Mirin seeks the princess' hand :	89
Mirin approaches Gushtasp :	89
Gushtasp slays the beast :	90
A suitor for the third princess :	91
Gushtasp to the rescue :	91
War with Khazar :	92
Rome emerges victorious :	92
Messenger to Iran :	92
Zarir goes to Rome:	93
Gushtasp returns to Iran :	93
5 KING GUSHTASP	94
Conflict with Arjasp :	94
PROPHET ZARTOSHT	94
Emergence of Prophet Zartosht :	94
Zartosht is accepted as the Prophet :	94
WAR BETWEEN IRAN AND TURAN.....	95
Conflict between Gushtasp and Arjasp :	95
Preparations for a war :	96
The War begins :	97
Death of Zarir :	97
Iran emerges victorious :	98
PRINCE ASPANDYAR	98
A religious mission :	98
The King is instigated :	98
Aspandyar is imprisoned :	99
Arjasp takes advantage :	100
Lohrasp dies a valiant death :	100
Princesses taken captive :	100
Aspandyar to be set free :	101
Jamasp goes to free Aspandyar :	101
Aspandyar agrees to go :	102
Aspandyar rescues his father :	102
Arjasp flees Iran :	103
A new task for Aspandyar :	103
'HAFT KHAN' - THE JOURNEY OF SEVEN STAGES.	104
Aspandyar goes to Turan:	104
The first stage :	104
The second stage :	105
The third stage :	105
The fourth stage :	106
The fifth stage :	106
The sixth stage :	107
The seventh stage :	107
Aspandyar reaches Ruindez :	108
A plan to enter the fort :	108
Aspandyar enters Ruindez :	108
Aspandyar meets his sisters :	109
Last stage of the plan :	109
Peshotan brings in the army :	110

Arjasp is killed :	110
The fall of Ruindez :	110
Aspandiyar returns to Iran :	110
ASPANDYAR AND RUSTAM.....	111
A new task for Aspandiyar :	111
Katabun advises Aspandiyar :	112
Aspandiyar sets off for Zabulistan :	112
Bahman goes as an envoy :	112
Rustam turns down the offer :	113
Aspandiyar meets Rustam :	113
A verbal duel :	114
Rustam tries to befriend Aspandiyar :	115
Rustam prepares for the duel :	115
Duel between Aspandiyar and Rustam :	115
War between the two camps :	116
Rustam flees from Aspandiyar :	117
Zal seeks Simurgh's help :	117
Rustam's last attempt to dissuade Aspandiyar :	118
Death of Aspandiyar :	119
Aspandiyar's body is taken to Balkh :	120
Letter about Bahman :	120
Bahman is called to Balkh :	121
Death of King Gushtasp :	121
Death of Rustam and Zavareh :	121
6. KING BAHMAN	121
Bahman seeks revenge :	121
Bahman ravages Zabul :	122
Faramarz is killed :	122
Bahman retracts :	122
Death of Bahman :	123
Sasan leaves the palace :	123
7. QUEEN HOMAI	123
Power corrupts Homai :	123
Homai abandons her child :	123
A washerman finds the child :	124
The child is named Darab :	124
Darab grows up :	124
Darab finds out his ancestry :	125
Darab enlists in the army :	125
Darab's miracle :	125
Darab becomes a hero :	126
The Queen finds her lost son :	127
8. KING DARAB	128
Darab proves to be a good king :	128
Battle with the Arabs :	128
War with Rome :	128
Truce at a price :	129
Birth of Eskinadar :	129

9. KING DARA..... 130

ESKANDAR..... 130

Eskandar becomes the Roman Kaisar :	130
Eskandar marches to Iran :	130
Eskandar in disguise :	130
Eskandar's identity is revealed :	131
Eskandar manages to escape :	131
Three battles :	132
Dara writes a letter of surrender :	133
Dara changes his mind :	133
Dara killed by his own men :	133
The sun sets on Kayanian empire :	134
Mahiyar and Januspar are punished :	134
Eskandar becomes the king of Iran :	134

*** FAMILY TREES 135**

Kayanian kings :	135
Iranian Paladins :	136
Turanian Viseh :	136
Turanian king Afrasiyab :	137

*** PRONUNCIATION OF PROPER NOUNS..... 138**

INTRODUCTION

The Kayan dynasty occupies about 55 % of the Shahnameh, the other two dynasties dealt with in the Shahnameh - Peshdad and Sasan roughly occupy 10 % and 35% of the Shahnameh respectively.

For understanding the history of a period, knowing its Geography would be very essential, and so I have incorporated a map of the boundaries of Iran during the Kayanian period, based on facts gleaned mainly from the Shahnameh. Family trees of kings and paladins have also been incorporated so that the relationship among the different noble men and royal personages can be gleaned at a glance. The pronunciations of proper nouns are given separately at the end of the book.

Unfortunately, there are some people who believe that the Peshdadian and Kayanian dynasties are mythological and not historical, since there is no chronicled or archaeological record of that period. However, one should remember that these dynasties covered the period of roughly between 9000 to 6000 B.C. This period belongs to the realm of pre-history, when the art of writing was not evolved. We have to depend on the Avesta and Pahlavi scriptures and the Shahnameh for constructing the history of this period. Presently the archaeological findings of about 4000 B.C. are being unearthed in the Central Asian regions in and around ancient Iran, and it may not be long before we may get archaeological evidences from the 6th and 7th millenium B.C, too.

Much of our religion's history is connected with these two dynasties, the biggest event of course being the advent of Prophet Zarathushtra. If one disregards this period, one loses out on the most important period of Zoroastrian and re-Zoroastrian history.

I thank Miss Gulshan Dalal for preparing life-like illustrations adorning this book. I also take thank my wife Havovi without whose constant support, help and encouragement this book would not have been possible.

THE KAYANIAN DYNASTY.

More than half of the Shahnameh deals with the Kayanian dynasty, and so it is natural that Firdausi considered it the most important of all the Iranian dynasties.

The word **Kayanian** means 'royal'. All the kings of the Kayanian dynasty, who ruled before the advent of Prophet Zarathushtra, were temporal as well as spiritual heads of their country and hence their names were prefixed by the title '**Kae**' before their names. This title indicated royalty coupled with spirituality. In the Avesta they are called **paoiryo-tkaesha**, that is, forerunners of prophet Zarathushtra.

The Kayanian dynasty is well known for its spiritual royal personages like Kae Lohrasp, Kae Gushtasp, Kae Khushroo and above all prophet Spitama Zarathushtra. It is also known for the escapades of the hero Rostam whose career spanned the reigns of most of its kings.

The last four rulers of the Kayanian dynasty in the Shahnameh seem to have been confused with those of the Achaemenian dynasty, whose downfall was brought about by Alexander the Macedonian, who is referred to as Iskandar the Roman over here.

1. KING KAE KOBAD

The search for a new king :

After the death of King Kersasp, the last king of the Peshdadian dynasty, there was no heir to the throne of Iran. Zal and Rostam took it upon themselves to find a suitable royal monarch for Iran. Zal came to know, through King Zav, that a descendant of King Faridun was living somewhere in the Alburz mountain in the care of holy men. Rostam himself went there to look for that descendant, who by now may have become a grown up man.

The child, who had grown up to be a responsible man, had realised his mission in life after having dreamt about his symbolically being chosen as the King. In the dream, he saw two eagles, indicating divinity, coming to him and placing a crown on his head. Hence it came as no surprise to him when Rostam came looking for him. Rostam was surprised at the readiness and confidence shown by Kobad to come to Iran, and when Kobad related the dream to him, he was assured that this man was the next divinely ordained king of Iran.

With Kobad, Rostam set off for Iran. On the way he met the Turanian spy Kalun who was on his way to Iran to gather secret military information. Rostam challenged Kalun to a duel in which the latter was killed. Rostam triumphantly marched off to Iran with Kobad where Zal received him. All priests, wise men and warriors of Iran unanimously accepted Kobad as their king.

Kobad is coronated :

Kobad was coronated as the first King of the Kayanian dynasty in presence of great Iranian warriors like Karan, Keshvad, Kharrad and Barzin. The name of the king was prefixed by the title 'Kae', and henceforth he came to be known as Kae Kobad. There was feasting for seven days. King Kae Kobad had his treasury situated in Pars and made Istakhra his capital.

War with Afrasiyab :

As soon as the feasting was over, King Kae Kobad prepared for war on a gigantic scale against the Turks (Turanians) led by Afrasiyab. The Iranian side had eminent warriors like Rostam, Zal, Mehrab, Gataham, Karan, Keshvad and Barzin. The Turanian side had Shamasas, Karsivaz, and Viseh.

The Iranians went into the war with the Kavyani Flag by their side. In course of the war the Turanian Warrior Shamasas was slain by Karan. Inspired by this, Rostam promised his father Zal that he would defeat Afrasiyab and drag him by his waistband to the king. He challenged Afrasiyab in the battlefield and the two fought for some time. He seized an opportunity and valiantly lifted up Afrasiyab from his waistband and was about to take him prisoner when luckily his waistband snapped and he fell to the ground.

Rostam tried to grab him with the other hand but all he could get in his hand was Afrasiyab's crown. The other Turanian soldiers watching the spectacle rushed to the

rescue of their king. Afrasiyab escaped by the skin of his teeth and Rustam greatly regretted missing this unique opportunity. Later Rustam sent the crown of Afrasiyab as a trophy to King Kae Kobad.

Terrified by this incident, Afrasiyab left the war and fled into a forest. The Turanian army could no longer take the onslaught led by King Kae Kobad under the powerful trio of Rustam, Zal and Mehrab. Soon thereafter, the Turanian army was routed back from Moghan and they retreated towards river Jaihun.

King Kae Kobad celebrated this success by liberally giving gifts to his soldiers and Warriors. He honoured Rustam and Zal by giving them a sit on the either sides of his throne.

Afrasiyab fled from the scene of the war and spent seven days in wilderness near the banks of river Jaihun. On the eighth day he went to his father Pashang and requested him to sign a peace treaty with King Kae Kobad as there was no way he could face or fight Rustam. Afrasiyab had broken the treaty he had signed with Peshdadian King Zav, and was now paying the price for it as he had lost many of his brave warriors like Gulbad, Barman, Kharjavan, Shamasas and Kalun. He repented before his father for his callous attitude and the thoughtless killing of his brother Agreras, and requested him to write a letter to King Kae Kobad.

Pashang requests for peace :

Seeing his son feeling sorry, Pashang was in a way happy that wisdom had at last dawned on his son. He made his scribe write a letter to Iran in which he desired to revert back to the division of the two countries as done by their ancestor King Faridun, with river Jaihun as the dividing line between the two countries. He requested an end to the war and sent his trusted warrior Visesh with the beautifully written illustrated letter along with several gifts to King Kae Kobad.

In his reply King Kae Kobad stated that the Turanians had always done the beginning of war. He emphasised that though he was well equipped to lend a crushing blow to them, he would let the war end for the sake of peace and welfare of the people of both countries. Once again Jaihun river was determined as the boundary between Iran and Turan.

Rustam averse to the Treaty :

Rustam, however, did not approve of this treaty because he realised that this Treaty was nothing but the Turanian's ruse to escape defeat, as the their army was already on a brink of defeat. He told his king that the Turanians would break the Treaty as soon as they recover and attack once again, as they had done several times in the past. However King Kae Kobad explained to Rustam that he desired peace and was against warfare, and hence he had accepted the offer of a Treaty.

King Kae Kobad gifted land from Zabulistan to river Sind to Rustam, and Kabul to Mehrab for their services during the war. He also bestowed rich gifts on Zal, Karan, Keshvad, Barzin, Pulad and other warriors.

King Kae Kobad abdicated his throne in favour of his son Kae Kaus, traveled around the world for about ten years and thereafter passed away peacefully.

2. KING KAE KAUS

With peace in Iran and Afrasiyab unwilling to break it on account of his fear of Rostam, King Kae Kaus had a very smooth time on the throne. Because of the ready riches, he had become vain and proud. He spent his time in feasting and merry-making.

As he mellowed, he started increasing the boundaries of his empire on all four sides with the help of Rostam. He was responsible for changing the small kingdom of Iran into a vast and major empire.

King Kae Kaus And Mazandaran

Singers from Mazandaran :

Once, during the early days of the kingship of King Kae Kaus, a group of singers and musicians came from the northern province of Mazandaran and sought permission to perform before the king. The permission was granted, and the group sang praises of the richness and attractiveness of Mazandaran, its abundant flora and fauna and its pleasant climate. This ethereal description of this magnificent place enthralled the king and he decided to attack and conquer the place and have it for himself.

When the wise men and warriors of the court of King Kae Kaus came to know about the king's plan, they were deeply concerned. They were aware that attacking Mazandaran meant a definite defeat for them as the King of Mazandaran was aided by powerful black magicians. No king after King Teimurasp, not even King Jamshed, Faridun or Minosheher had tried to disturb the peace of Iran by attacking Mazandaran.

Zal is summoned :

Knowing the adamant nature of their king, they showed willingness for going to Mazandaran with him on his face. However, later on, they consulted among themselves and the wise warrior Toos suggested that they send for Zal, whom King Kae Kaus respected, and who being a senior statesman would be requested to advise the king against going to Mazandaran.

The warriors immediately sent a messenger requesting Zal to come urgently to Iran. On receiving the news, Zal, who though now being too old to undertake the journey, responded immediately and set off to talk to King Kae Kaus.

Zal admonishes King Kae Kaus :

Zal patiently explained the king that the people of Mazandaran practiced black magic and witchcraft and in that they were helped and guided by great demons. Spells and magic protected Mazandaran. Just having a great army was not enough to defeat Mazandaran, as it needed a lot of spiritual strength to stand against the powerful onslaught of the sorcerers of Mazandaran, for which the Iranian soldiers were not properly equipped.

His predecessors, though very great kings, had not even thought of going near Mazandaran, hence it would be in his own interest and in the interest of his kingdom, and warriors that he forsake the idea of conquering Mazandaran.

The pleas of Zal, however, fell on deaf ears as King Kae Kaus had made up his mind to go to Mazandaran. He said that he considered himself braver and greater than his predecessors and hence well equipped to take a campaign to Mazandaran. He further reprimanded Zal by saying that if he was unwilling to come with him on this campaign, he will go alone with his soldiers. Moreover, he requested Zal and his son Rostam to look after Iran's throne in his absence.

Zal was greatly disappointed that his mission was not successful. The Iranian warriors thanked him for undertaking the arduous journey to come to Iran on their request. Zal in turn advised the warriors to obey their king, wished them well and returned to Sistan.

King Kae Kaus goes to Mazandaran :

After some preparations, Kae Kaus set off for Mazandaran along with Gudarz (now colloquially pronounced as Godrej) and Toos through the rocky terrain of the Asperuz mountains. Gurgin's father Milad was kept as the caretaker king and was handed over the keys of the treasury. In case of emergency, he was instructed to call on Zal and Rostam.

Gudarz's son Giv, was sent ahead of the battalion to clear the way and provide advance information to the troops that followed. Giv was awe-struck on seeing the natural beauty of Mazandaran. It was much more spectacular than anybody could imagine. He immediately sent a message to this effect to his king. On receiving the message, Kae Kaus resumed his campaign with greater vigour and within a few days arrived at the outskirts of Mazandaran at dusk time. He decided to rest his soldiers for the night and planned an attack for the following morning.

Mazandaran prepares for war :

The King of Mazandaran became aware of Giv's presence and sensing danger, sent a demon by the name Sanjeh as a messenger to Div-e-Sapid (The White Demon, popularly known as 'Safed dev' in Gujarati), the leader of all black magicians, to come to his aid.

Div-e-Sapid spells doom :

Div-e-Sapid was as tall as the skies. On receiving the message from his king, he sent his men to scout the territory. They came and reported that King Kae Kaus was camping on the outskirts. Div-e-Sapid with his evil powers immediately enveloped the entire Iranian army under a huge black cloud and showered bricks and stones on them.

The Iranian army was not prepared for this sudden onslaught. They ran helter and skelter, and in the pandemonium that ensued more than half of Iranian soldiers perished. As morning dawned, the remaining soldiers, including King Kae Kaus, realised that they had become stone blind. They stayed that way for seven days and on the eighth day Div-e-Sapid came and proclaimed that they had just noticed a small prelude of what he can

do. He further said that he could have destroyed them all but for his promise to the great Iranian paladin Kersasp under whose obligation he was.

Div-e-Sapid then had all the Iranian soldiers and warriors, including their king, imprisoned at Mazandaran. The king repented at not having heeded the advice of his Zal.

King Kae Kaus sends for help :

Before being imprisoned, King Kae Kaus was fortunate enough to find a soldier who had managed to escape the magic charm. He urgently sent him to Zabulistan requesting Zal to immediately send help and apologised to him for not heeding his counsel.

On receiving the message, Zal became very upset. He at once called for Rustam and ordered him to set off towards Mazandaran to rescue the king.

Rustam goes to Mazandaran :

Young Rustam was reluctant to go to Mazandaran, he tried to reason with his father saying, “ Father, I would most willingly submit to any of your command, but why should we help the king, who does not heed our advice.”

Zal pacified Rustam saying, “ Son, the king did what he thought fit at that moment. As faithful servers of the king it is our duty and responsibility to go and rescue him, irrespective of his attitude towards us.”

“But”, Rustam reasoned, “Mazandaran is so far away that it would take me at least six months to go to Mazandaran, and then it would be too late to rescue our King.” The wise Zal then revealed a secret to his son, saying, “There is a shorter route to Mazandaran a route, which will take you just a fortnight.”

“But father,” Rustam interjected with surprise, “ that route is said to be very dangerous and nobody going through that route is known to have come out alive.” “I know son,” continued Zal with all the calmness that he could command, “ that this particular route is infested with all sorts of evils and dangers, but I am confident, that you, my son, with your physical and spiritual strength will overcome them all and emerge victorious against all evil forces. Go forth dear son, our prayers are with you.” These encouraging words enthused Rustam, and he pledged that he will go to Mazandaran to rescue his king.

Rustam passes the ‘Haftkhan’ :

The following day Rustam’s parents Zal and Rodabeh, with a heavy heart bade him good-bye, because in their heart of hearts they knew what a perilous journey their son was undertaking.

Rustam set off on his horse Raksh towards Mazandaran. On his way he overcame seven hazardous obstacles (Haftkhan) which included passing through jungles and deserts and fighting dangerous animals like lions and dragons and negotiating the spells caste by black magicians. He wove his way through this dangerous journey by the sheer dint of his physical and spiritual strength.

Towards the end of this journey a young man by the name Aulad acted as his guide through the treacherous terrain of Mazandaran. Rustam promised to make him the king of Mazandaran after the present evil king was overthrown.

King Kae Kaus is freed :

Rustam overcame this perilous journey, defeated and killed Div-e-Sapid and not only freed King Kae Kaus and his soldiers from imprisonment and restored their eyesight but also set fire to the whole of Mazandaran with all its sorcerers, thus freeing the city from the sorcerers' magic spells.

A messenger is sent to Mazandaran :

Thereafter King Kae Kaus sent the warrior Farhad as a messenger to the king of Mazandaran asking him to accept defeat and give tribute or else be ready for a war with Rustam.

Farhad reached the province of Narmpay in Mazandaran, and then sent a messenger to the king announcing his arrival. When the king of Mazandaran came to know that a messenger from Iran had come his way, he made a vain show of valour and power to impress Farhad. He sent his strong men to shake hands with him. They tried to squeeze Farhad's hands, but all of their squeezing and pressing did not evince as much as a wince from Farhad, and thus the show of strength by the king and his warriors had no effect whatsoever on the valiant messenger.

Then Farhad conveyed to the king of Mazandaran that all his demons and sorcerers had been killed and that he now had to accept defeat. However, instead of accepting defeat, he challenged the king of Iran to a war.

King Kae Kaus was furious when he got this news. He called Rustam and he too was enraged on seeing this letter. He told his king to write a very strong letter to the king of Mazandaran and then he himself would go to dispatch it and tell the king either to accept King Kae Kaus' sovereignty or be ready for his wrath.

Rustam returns :

The great Rustam proceeded to Mazandaran with the letter. On his way there was a huge army to intercept him. The mighty Rustam uprooted a colossal tree and hurled it on the army crushing most of its front line soldiers. From the rank and file a burly looking warrior, who was known for his steely grip came to crush the hands of Rustam. He offered to shake hands with him, but instead of crushing Rustam's hand, his own hand was crushed so badly that his vein snapped and he instantly died. On seeing Rustam's strength the entire army was terrified.

The message soon reached the king, and he sent his most powerful warrior Kalahur, but he too was no match for the invincible Rustam. He too tried to crush Rustam's hand, but his own hand was so badly crushed that all the nails fell off his fingers. With a limp hand, Kalahur returned back to the king and requested him to accept defeat or else Rustam seemed to be bent on razing the entire Mazandaran to ground.

The king summoned Rustam and asked, “Who are you O strong warrior!” The great Rustam replied in jest, “I am but a small attendant of the great warrior Rustam.” On hearing this the king tried to bribe Rustam, “Come over to my side and I would give you hundred times more than what you are getting.”

This dishonesty of the king enraged Rustam and he cautioned him never to utter such words again or he would pull the tongue out of his mouth. The king was greatly insulted by this reply and he asked his executioner to slay Rustam. Rustam’s who was already angry at the unethical conduct of the king, found an outlet for his anger on the executioner who was torn into two.

The king was terrified at seeing Rustam’s strength. He tried to pacify him by offering rich gifts, but Rustam ignored all the priceless gifts and stamped out of the court. He returned to King Kae Kaus, narrated to him all that had happened and asked him to prepare for war. The king of Mazandaran too prepared for a war and started marching towards Iran.

War with Mazandaran :

When King Kae Kaus realised that the Mazandaran army was proceeding towards Iran he ordered Rustam and his other brave warriors Toos, Keshvad, Gudarz, Giv and Gurgin to prepare for the war. King Kae Kaus himself, as the commander-in-chief of the army took its helm. The armies of Mazandaran and Iran met in a war, which lasted for seven days. During the war Rustam defeated Mazandaran’s most well known warrior Juya who had come to challenge the Iranian army.

On the seventh day, King Kae Kaus prayed to God to help him and his warriors overpower the evil king. The next day, Mazandaran’s king was cornered by Rustam who pierced him with his spear. However, the king, by his magic, turned into a mountain rock.

King Kae Kaus, Rustam and all others who were present there were utterly amazed. He ordered his soldiers to shift this mountain rock near his tent, but once again to their surprise, they could move the rock. Then Rustam himself tried and he was easily able to lift the rock. Lifting it on his shoulders, he put it near his king’s tent.

Iran wins the war :

Rustam then threatened the king of Mazandaran that if he did not resume his original shape, he would crush the rock to small pieces. On hearing this threat the king immediately resumed his human form. He was a tall, stout, dark ugly looking man with animal like neck and teeth. King Kae Kaus immediately ordered his executioner to kill him. Thus the evil reign of the king of Mazandaran came to an end. After a long time Mazandaran once again came under the rule of Iranian kings.

King Kae Kaus distributed the treasures from the war among his soldiers. Toos was made the commander-in-chief of the Iranian army. Gudarz, who was the king’s minister, was gifted the province of Esfahan. There were prayers and festivities for two weeks. King Kae Kaus thanked Rustam for his help. Rustam, as per his promise requested the king to

make Aulad, who had helped him find his way to Mazandaran, the king of Mazandaran, to which the good king very willingly agreed.

King Kae Kaus thereafter returned to Iran. He honoured Rustam and rewarded him by giving a precious throne, a jewel studded crown, a gold embroidered robe and many other valuable things. Rustam then returned to his native place Nimruz in Zabulistan.

King Kae Kaus And Hamavaran

King Kae Kaus surveys his kingdom :

After his victory in Mazandaran, King Kae Kaus decided to survey his territory and went from place to place. He started with the eastern provinces and visited Turan, China and Makran and met their kings who regularly paid him tributes and had accepted his sovereignty.

From there, he went to Barbary whose king had not accepted King Kae Kaus's sovereignty, and had refused to pay tributes. King Kae Kaus challenged him to a war in which noted paladins like Gudarz, his son Giv, King Kae Kaus's son Fariburz, Gastaham, Toos and Gurgin were fighting on the Iranian side. Within a short time, the king of Barbary was defeated. He accepted King Kae Kaus's supremacy and agreed to pay him tributes.

From there, King Kae Kaus visited places in the West near Kohekaf (Caucasus mountains) and then went to Sistan to visit Rustam. There he stayed in the capital city of Nimruz for a month where the royal entourage was feasted and entertained with music and hunting sessions.

The kingdom of Hamavaran was always giving trouble to Iranian kings. When the king was on his visits, the king of Hamavaran once again revolted, this time taking the help of Misar(Egypt) and Sham(Syria). King Kae Kaus along with his soldiers immediately set out to Hamavaran via the shorter sea route. A severe war took place in which the rebels were badly defeated. They sought forgiveness from the king and agreed to pay tributes.

King Kae Kaus marries Sodabeh :

King Kae Kaus came to know that the king of Hamavaran had a beautiful daughter, Sodabeh. He wanted to marry her and hence sent a witty and experienced courtier to ask the king of Hamavaran for the hand of his daughter.

On receiving the message, the king of Hamavaran was very distressed because he was too attached to his only daughter to give her in marriage. However, he was afraid of refusing the offer of such a powerful king. Hence he consulted his shrewd daughter, who advised him to accede to the Iranian king's request. With a heavy heart the king of Hamavaran sent his daughter to Iran for marriage, but soon after started plotting to avenge this unwilling marriage.

King Kae Kaus is trapped :

A week after the wedding, the king of Hamavaran invited King Kae Kaus over to his kingdom. The shrewd Sodabeh immediately gauged the intentions of her father and cautioned the king of Iran not to go to Hamavaran, but the guileless king accepted the invitation and went with there his paladins.

King Kae Kaus was received with great pomp and he was offered the best of hospitalities for seven days. However, when after seven days, King Kae Kaus and his entourage was about to leave for Iran, the army of Barbary launched a pre-planned attack on the king of Hamavaran and took King Kae Kaus, his paladins Gudarz, Giv, Toos, Gurgin and Jangeh and also the soldiers as prisoners and put them up in a remote fort on a mountain.

Thereafter the king of Hamavaran sent some maids to Iran to summon his daughter. When Sodabeh came to know of the plight of her husband, she chided her father on his cowardly conspiracy and asked to have her husband freed immediately, but the king enraged by her scathing remarks, also imprisoned her in the fort.

Turan takes advantage :

In Iran, King Kae Kaus' disappearance created alarm, and this alerted Iran's enemies. The Turks, Turanians and Arabs attacked Iran and tried to seize the throne. Battles ensued between them. The Arabs were defeated by the Turks, who in return were defeated by the Turanian Afrasiyab. The Turanians took control over Iran, imprisoned its soldiers and started tormenting the women and children. Some soldiers, who had escaped the clutches of Afrasiyab, went to seek Rustam's help.

Rustam to the rescue :

Rustam was distressed on hearing the plight of his people. He immediately swung into action and first decided to look for his king and ensure his safety. He was aware that his king had been to Hamavaran, and so he sent a messenger to its king reprimanding him for deceiving his king, and asked him to immediately release his king or be prepared for a war. At the same time, Rustam kept himself in readiness by summoning his troops.

The king of Hamavaran did not heed Rustam's warning. On the contrary he insulted the messenger and challenged Rustam to a war. Rustam was enraged at this open challenge. He set out through the shorter sea route and in no time reached Hamavaran. His fury was soon evident when most of Hamavaran's army was in shambles. The king of Hamavaran was flabbergasted on seeing Rustam's might. He immediately sent for help from his allies, the kings of Misar and Barbary, who promptly responded by sending their armies.

Rustam was ready to face and disintegrate all the three armies but he was afraid that his defeating the three armies might anger the king of Hamavaran who may retaliate by hurting King Kae Kaus. He immediately sent a messenger, asking king Kae Kaus for the course of action. The king wisely replied that his life and security was not as important as the security of the country and he asked Rustam to wreak havoc in his inimitable style. However, on a cautionary note he advised him to take care of the people of Iran if something untoward happened to him.

King Kae Kaus is freed :

Rustam, along with other warriors like his brother Zavareh, once again lashed out on the three combined armies and in no time decimated them. The kings of Misar and Barbary were taken captive. The king of Hamavaran was terrified at this havoc created by the Iranian warriors. He immediately sent for Rustam, asked for his forgiveness and requested him to end the war, promising to release King Kae Kaus with due dignity.

Rustam asked King Kae Kaus whether the enemy king should be forgiven, and the king of Iran in his magnanimity forgave him. The king of Hamavaran and the other two kings also promised to pay regular taxes and offered rich gifts to the king of Iran.

King Kae Kaus And Afrasiyab

King Kae Kaus seeks Roman help :

King Kae Kaus could not immediately return to Iran, as the Turanian king Afrasiyab occupied the throne of Iran. King Kae Kaus stayed on in Barbary with his retinue, from where he planned the preparations for a war with Afrasiyab to oust him from Iran. He asked for the help from the Kaisar of Rome requesting him to send an army. The Kaisar immediately relented, and sent his army to join the Iranian army.

After this, King Kae Kaus sent a letter to Afrasiyab asking him to unconditionally vacate the throne of Iran. In the letter he reminded Afrasiyab about the shame he had to face at the hands of Rustam. Afrasiyab was furious on reading this letter as his pride was hurt. He claimed that Iran was equally his as King Faridun was his great grand father, and moreover he had freed Iran from the clutches of the Arabs when King Kae Kaus was imprisoned in Hamavaran. Hence he staked a claim to Iran and sent the messenger challenging King Kae Kaus to a war.

King Kae Kaus's victory :

As soon as King Kae Kaus received the defiant message from Afrasiyab, he attacked him with the help of the Roman troops. There was heavy casualty on both sides. The irrepressible Rustam created havoc in the enemy camp. The Turanian soldiers were utterly demoralised on seeing Rustam. Afrasiyab in a lame attempt to boost the morale of his army offered the hand of his daughter, a part of his kingdom and the position of his army's commander to the soldier who would kill or imprison Rustam.

However, even the magnificent offers of Afrasiyab could not give enough courage to any soldier to go near Rustam. Two-thirds of the Turanian army was decimated. Afrasiyab saw no point in continuing the war and he along with a few soldiers fled Iran. King Kae Kaus returned to Pars and triumphantly re-occupied his throne.

King Kae Kaus Attempts To Fly

Evil tempt King Kae Kaus :

King Kae Kaus now had everything he could ask for, so he concentrated his attention on other things. He had a beautiful palace built in the Alburz Mountains using the services of the evil demons as labourers. The complex had two golden, two silver, two iron and two crystal palaces for the great king with special chambers for armouries and residence.

Angra Mainyu, the chief of the evil ones, was angry with the king that he had made his hordes work hard in building the palaces. He was also jealous of the success of King Kae Kaus that he took it upon himself to humiliate him. He ordered his brood of demons to think of a plan to humiliate King Kae Kaus in the eyes of his subjects.

One of the chief demons by the name of Aeshma came up with the idea that since King Kae Kaus was very naive and inquisitive, his faith in God should be shaken and he be tempted to know the secrets of nature. In this way the king will make a fool of himself, lose the trust of his courtiers and subjects and may even lose his Kayanian Glory.

This plan of Aeshma was well received and he himself went down to earth in the garb of a court attendant. As is the practice of those who purposely mislead, he at first highly flattered the king and then put in the proposition that he should make more efforts to know about the workings of laws of nature and the movements of the heavenly bodies.

Aeshma misguided the king by saying that he will be able to fathom the secrets of the sky if he tried to fly like the birds. At first, the king did not accept this suggestion as it shook his firm belief in God and His wisdom. However, after some persuasion and listening to the plan laid down by Aeshma, he started giving thought to the crazy idea and started making preparations for his attempt to fly.

The flight and fall of King Kae Kaus :

As per the first steps to the preparations he started inquiring about the height of the sky and the distance of the stars and the sun from earth. Thereafter, he asked his attendants to get for him fledglings from the nest of the huge bird by the name Okab (eagle). These fledglings were fed and made strong so that they may be able to bear his weight.

A wooden throne was then made and plated with gold. Spears were tied to this throne in such a way that the birds could carry the throne. He selected four of the strongest birds, tied each of the four corners of the throne to a bird, sat on the throne and then the birds were made to fly, taking King Kae Kaus along with them high up in the sky.

The birds flew in the air for a long time, but finally they got tired and fell from great heights onto the ground somewhere near Amul in Mazandaran bordering towards China. It was indeed a miracle that the king survived. Firdausi says that God, in His wisdom, wanted him to live because Siyavakhsh was yet to be born.

King Kae Kaus repents :

The senior paladins, especially Gudarz who was the senior most, strongly reprimanded the king for creating problems for the entire nation. This was the third time that he did not heed their advice and landed everybody into trouble.

King Kae Kaus himself was feeling sorry for his behaviour and passed his days in great remorse. For 40 days he continuously prayed to God asking for forgiveness for his arrogant thoughts and foolish behaviour and only after that did he resume his throne. The senior courtiers and paladins forgave him and peace once again reigned in Iran.

Sohrab And Rustam

Gazdam's letter to Kaus :

All was going well for King Kae Kaus when he received a letter from Gazdam, the caretaker of the fort of Sapid, which was on the border between Iran and Turan. A young lad of 14 by the name of Sohrab, who hailed from Turkistan, had come with the army from Turan. He was creating havoc and was unstoppable. His facial features resembled Rustam and he seemed to be of the family of Nariman.

Hazir, son of Gudarz, who was the custodian of the fort, was defeated and imprisoned by Sohrab within the blink of an eye. Gazdam requested for instant help from the king, dispatched a messenger at night through a secret route and he himself with his family fled the fort at night. The next morning Sohrab entered the fort without any difficulty or opposition.

When King Kae Kaus received Gazdam's message, he realised the urgency of the situation and immediately called a conference of his trusted warriors Toos, Keshvad, Gudarz, Giv, Gurgin, Behram and Farhad and appraised them of the situation. It was unanimously decided in the conference that Rustam was the only person who could contain the might of Sohrab and save the Iranians, and so they selected Giv to be urgently sent to Zabulistan to summon Rustam.

King Kae Kaus sends for Rustam :

King Kae Kaus prepared a hasty letter and dispatched it to Rustam. In the letter, he first lauded the services of Rustam and his family to Iran, and then requested him to urgently come to the aid of his country. He dispatched Giv and advised him to come back immediately with Rustam without even waiting to rest. Giv immediately set off for Zabulistan and did not wait anywhere on the way either for eating or resting.

On reaching Zabulistan, he gave the urgent message of summons, but Rustam was not willing to go immediately, as he believed that he was not a servant of the king to go at his beck and call. He asked Giv to wait till he was ready. Three days passed during which Giv repeatedly reminded Rustam that the fury of the king would know no bounds if they were late, but Rustam was in no mood to relent. Finally on the fourth day, they set off for Iran.

King Kae Kaus insults Rustam :

As soon as Giv and Rustam reached the palace, they went to see the king. However the king was fuming with anger because of the long delay. He fired Rustam by saying, “Who do you think you are that you disobey the king’s orders and place your own whims before the interests of the country”. Then, in a fit of anger he ordered Toos to take Giv and Rustam to the gallows and hang them.

Rustam’s scathing reply :

This insult was too much for the great Rustam. As he was fuming with rage, Toos approached him to pacify him and take him away from the temperamental king. However, a furious Rustam jerked away the great warrior Toos, who was hurtled away like a small child.

Rustam reminded the king in no uncertain terms that he was alive and on the throne just because of him. He told the king, “Don’t think you are my master or provider - God alone is my provider. My horse Rakhsh is my throne, my mace is my seal and my helmet is my crown, I don’t need anything else.” He hastily he left the palace telling the other paladins to fend for themselves and their country as he was leaving Iran forever.

The paladins were very upset with their king for insulting and infuriating the great Rustam. They once again approached the senior paladin Gudarz for a solution to this problem. The aged warrior went to the king and reproached him for being rude to Rustam, who had several times saved the king from certain death.

Gudarz told the king that he will now be responsible for Iran’s plight as Gazdam had clearly indicated in his letter that no paladin except Rustam would be capable of taking on the might of Sohrab. He once again chided the king for losing his cool instead of handling the situation delicately and wisely.

The reconciliation :

King Kae Kaus once again realised his folly. He agreed with Gudarz and sent an apology to Rustam. Some of the paladins along with Gudarz carried the king’s message to Rustam and asked him to forgive the king, who, though ill tempered was good at heart and had a noble disposition. Rustam was also told that by leaving Iran he was not punishing the king, but the entire nation, as it will be the people who would have to bear the brunt of the attack of the Turanians. Rustam however was very firm. He maintained that he was not a servant of the king and the king had no business to treat him so rudely.

When Rustam was not convinced, Gudarz tried another stratagem to convince him. He tried to appeal to the vanity of Rustam by telling him that the king, soldiers and people of Iran were thinking that he had left Iran because he is afraid to face the young paladin of Turkistan. All the soldiers and paladins think that if the great Rustam is not ready to face this young paladin they stand no chance before him, and so all are deciding to desert the war and flee. This argument touched a chord in Rustam’s heart and after some further persuasion he agreed to return to Iran.

As soon as the King Kae Kaus received the message that Rustam had agreed to come back to Iran, he was jubilant. He made elaborate preparations for receiving Rustam, and when he finally arrived, the king greeted him with profuse apologies. He asked forgiveness for his rudeness and blamed his natural disposition for his uncouth behaviour and fits of anger. Thereafter both the king and Rustam accepted each other's respective superior positions and the king declared a feast to commemorate the reconciliation.

March towards the fort of Sapid :

Immediately the following day, the Iranian soldiers along with Rustam and other paladins marched towards the fort of Sapid which Sohrab had captured and where the Turanian army was stationed.

When Homan, the Turanian commander, and Sohrab saw from the fort that the Iranian army was approaching, Homan was distressed and tense, but Sohrab was confident of himself and his ability to fight against any warrior. He was also excited on the prospects of meeting his father Rustam.

Death of Zindeh-razam :

The Iranian army was stationed some distance away from the fort of Sapid. At dusk, Rustam decided to go to the fort in disguise to take stock of the situation in the enemy camp and get any information possible. He hid in a dark corner and spotted Sohrab sitting calmly discussing the stratagems of war. He was flanked on one side by the Turanian commanders Barman and Homan and on the other side was his maternal uncle Zindeh-razam, who was the prince of Samangan. He was specially sent by Tehmina, the mother of Sohrab to identify Rustam and facilitate the meeting between the father and the son.

Zindeh-razam saw some movement in the distant corner where Rustam was hiding so he went to investigate. Rustam was not able to identify Zindeh-razam in the darkness. Zindeh-razam too saw the silhouette of Rustam but failed to identify him, and tried to raise an alarm. Rustam immediately silenced him and dealt a powerful blow on his neck, rendering him lifeless. Thus was gone the only link who would have identified the father to the son.

When Sohrab realised that Zindeh-razam had not returned since a long time, he sent an attendant, who returned with the tragic news of the death of Zindeh-razam. Sohrab was grieved at this loss and immediately realised that an intruder had entered the palace. He told his men to prepare for the war and decided to launch an attack the following day.

Rustam returned to his camp and gave the news of war preparations in the enemy camp to King Kae Kaus. He even described the grandeur of Sohrab to the king and other Iranian paladins and asked them to be prepared to face an attack any time from the Turanians.

Sohrab takes stock :

The following day, Sohrab mounted his black horse and climbed to a strategic point from where he could take stock of the Iranian army. He called Hazir, the commander of the fort of Sapid whom he had imprisoned, and asked him to identify the different tents with

the hope that he may get some clue to the identity of Rustam. Hazir properly identified the tents of all other paladins, but when he came to the tent of Rustam, he lied that the tent was that of a newly recruited warrior from China. Hazir's intention was to protect Rustam - the greatest asset of the Iranian army, from any unsuspecting attack by the enemies. Sohrab was dejected that he could not get any information about Rustam.

Thereafter, Sohrab sped off alone towards the Iranian camp and went straight to King Kae Kaus's tent where he challenged the king to send any of his warriors to fight him. King Kae Kaus was terrified by the gigantic looks of Sohrab and immediately sent Toos to summon Rustam to take on this great warrior. On receiving the urgent message in his tent, Rustam immediately prepared himself and set off for the battlefield.

Sohrab meets Rustam :

Both the great warriors -Sohrab and Rustam - came face to face with each other, and decided to go to a secluded place for a duel. While on the way, Sohrab felt affection towards Rustam and asked him whether he was Rustam. In order to put him off guard Rustam replied that he was a very small warrior in comparison to the great Rustam.

The two great warriors went to a secluded place and started their duel, first with spears and swords, and then with mace and bow-arrows. The duels between the two were so fierce that their weapons got worn out and their horses became tired, but none proved superior to the other. Finally, at dusk they stopped the duel for the day and decided to meet again the next day for a weaponless duel.

Rustam had never faced such stiff competition ever before. He was feeling frail and weak. He was dejected to such an extent that he even sent a message to King Kae Kaus not to continue the war in event of his death, because no one in Iran would be able to match the strength of Sohrab.

On the other hand Sohrab was feeling guilty for the duel firstly because of the age difference and secondly because he was feeling a strange attachment towards Rustam. He dreaded the possibility of actually fighting against his own father.

Rustam deceives Sohrab :

The following day Sohrab and Rustam met again. Sohrab once again appealed to Rustam to reveal his identity as he was feeling a great affection towards him, but Rustam misunderstood his tender sentiments as a young warrior's ploy to outsmart him and did not reveal his true identity. He challenged Sohrab to a duel in which he felt powerless.

Within no time Sohrab flung Rustam to the ground and sat on his chest. As he was about to pierce his heart with a dagger, Rustam played a trick on him. He stopped Sohrab saying that it was against Iranian rules of war to strike the opponent the first time he is flung to the ground. Sohrab took this to be true, and partly due to his bravery and partly due to his large heartedness, let Rustam go. It was only when Sohrab returned to his camp and narrated the incident to Homan that he came to know that he was deceived.

On the other hand, Rustam was shaken by the happenings of the day. He prayed to God and asked back for the strength, which he had voluntarily surrendered when his feet had started sinking in the ground due to the weight of his body. He got back his strength, and reinvigorated met Sohrab the next day in a hand to hand combat.

The last duel :

With renewed strength Rustam started fighting Sohrab, and soon got an upper hand over him. At the first opportunity he toppled Sohrab on the ground and before the winking of an eye thrust a dagger in his heart. This took the young warrior by surprise, as he had expected a reprieve for the first time. He cried foul against Rustam and lamented that now he would have to end his life without being able to see the face of his beloved father, to find whom he had undertaken this campaign. He, however, warned Rustam saying that he had killed him by treacherous means, and when his father Rustam would find this out he would seek him out from anywhere in the world and take revenge.

Rustam was shocked to hear this. He asked Sohrab about any evidence that he was Rustam's son and Sohrab ripped open his armour and showed him the gemstone, which was tied to his arm. This was the same gemstone which Rustam had given to his wife Tehmina and instructed her to give it to their child for identification. When Rustam saw the gemstone he took the head of his son in his lap and screamed in agony. He was inconsolable when he realised that he himself had brought about the death of his son.

When Rustam did not return to the Iranian camp by evening, the other paladins became worried and went searching for him. On seeing Rustam's horse standing alone in a corner, they jumped to the hasty conclusion that he might have been killed in the duel by Sohrab and immediately rushed to King Kae Kaus to give him the news. King Kae Kaus immediately sent a messenger to the Turanian camp to ascertain the fate of Rustam.

However, it was Sohrab who was breathing his last. The young warrior was however happy and contented that he had finally found his father. He made a final request to Rustam to spare the Turkish and Turanian soldiers as now without him they would be rudderless and will not be able to fight the mighty Iranian warriors.

Rustam immediately set off to fulfill his son's last wish. When the Iranian camp saw Rustam, they heaved a sigh of relief, but were worried to see him in such a disheveled state with clothes torn and eyes red with tears. Rustam narrated the unfortunate incident of his having stabbed his own son with his own hands. The entire Iranian camp was shocked at hearing this news. Rustam sent his brother Zavareh to Homan, the Turanian commander, to relay him the tragic news. Homan, who had nurtured Sohrab in the arts of warfare, was also stunned by this news. He put the blame of the whole tragedy on Hazir who had knowingly concealed the identity of Rustam from Sohrab.

Zavareh returned to the Iranian camp and informed Rustam that Hazir was the culprit behind this tragedy. Mad with rage, Rustam rushed to even scores with Hazir. He was about to kill him when other warriors intervened and pacified Rustam to spare Hazir as

whatever he had done, was with good intentions. Rustam let off Hazir and immediately sped off along with Toos, Gudarz and Gastaham towards his wounded son.

Rustam requests for 'Noshdaru' :

Suddenly Rustam realised that King Kae Kaus had a medicine by the name 'Noshdaru' which healed the worst of wounds. He requested Gudarz to get it urgently. When Gudarz went to King Kae Kaus and requested him to give the medicine, the king declined to give it as he feared that if Sohrab survived, then the father and son would form a formidable duo. He suspected that the two may get together, topple his rule and snatch his throne away from him. Gudarz returned to Rustam and asked him to go personally and request the king for the medicine. As an anguished Rustam set out to go, he received the news that Sohrab was no more in the world.

Sohrab breathes his last :

The news of Sohrab's death at his own hands was too much for Rustam to bear. He grieved and sobbed uncontrollably. He requested the other paladins who were sharing his grief to request the king to announce the end of war as per the last wishes of Sohrab.

The lifeless body of Sohrab was taken to Zabulistan where his grandparents Zal and Rodabeh too broke down on seeing the young and handsome Sohrab lying in a state of eternal rest. Rustam had a new Dakhma (Dakhma - an open round structure where dead bodies of Mazdayasnis/Zoroastrians are exposed to the elements) erected in the shape of a horseshoe and laid the body of his son in it.

The news of Sohrab's death spread like wild-fire all around the world. In Turan, Homan delivered the news to Afrasiyab who too was grieved at this sudden death. In no time, the tragic news reached the King of Samangan who conveyed the same to Tehmina, the young mother of Sohrab. Tehmina who was excitedly preparing for the return of her young son along with his father was shattered at this news. She could not come to terms with the fact that her young promising son was now a lifeless lump of flesh.

In a mad frenzy, she destroyed everything that reminded her of Sohrab. Unable to bear the pain, she often lapsed into unconsciousness. She donned a black dress and passed her days in a dazed state. Unable to bear the shock, she too passed away within a year of her son's death.

Prince Siyavakhsh

Siyavakhsh's mother :

One day, early in the morning, Toos, Giv and some other warriors set off for hunting in the forests of Daghui near Turkistan. Suddenly both of them spotted a tall, slim and beautiful maiden and went towards her. Both of them fell for the pretty girl and asked her identity. The girl said that she was from a noble family, but had run away from her house. She claimed descent from Karsivaz who belonged to the family of Tur, son of Faridun.

Both Toos and Giv staked their claim for marrying the maiden. As they were about to enter a duel, other noblemen intervened and advised them to go to the king and seek justice. They brought the maiden to the king, in order to get justice from him, but the king too was smitten by the charms of this simple and rustic yet angelic looking woman. He pacified Toos and Giv by giving them gifts, married the woman and gave her a high position in the queen's quarters.

The birth of Siyavakhsh :

The king spent most of his time with this beautiful maiden and in due course of time she expected a child from the king. After nine months she gave birth to a divine looking child perfect in shape and form, who was given the name Siyavakhsh.

When Siyavakhsh was a young boy, Rustam proposed to the king to send the prince to him for education. The king was too happy at this proposal, and so Rustam took Siyavakhsh to Zabulistan and gave him complete education which included the arts and crafts of horse-riding, archery, hunting, warfare, administration, executing justice and oratory. After he became proficient, Rustam brought Siyavakhsh back to the palace.

The king, paladins and noblemen welcomed the young prince who had now blossomed into a handsome youth under the tutelage of Rustam. They saw radiant glory emanating from his face and were delighted at his brilliance. For seven years, the king tested him in his court and only then did he adorn him with a golden crown and waistband and granted him the province of Kohistan (Transoxnia).

Sodabeh smitten by Siyavakhsh :

One day, when King Kae Kaus and Siyavakhsh were having a talk, the young queen Sodabeh saw the handsome prince and was instantly smitten by his looks. She started pining for him and sent a secret message inviting him to the queen's quarters at night. Siyavakhsh was not at all pleased with this covert invitation and did not respond to it.

Sodabeh then decided to employ some other trick to get Siyavakhsh into the queen's quarters. The next day she approached King Kae Kaus and requested him to send Siyavakhsh to the queen's quarters as the ladies over there including his sibling sisters, were longing to see and meet him. The king was not able to see the sinister design behind this request and so he asked Siyavakhsh to go to the queen's quarters to meet his step mother Sodabeh and his sibling sisters. Siyavakhsh, after some reluctance accepted his father's orders and went to the queen's quarters.

Sodabeh lures Siyavakhsh :

Hirbad, the custodian of queen's quarters was instructed by the king to allow Siyavakhsh into it. The next day, Siyavakhsh went to the queen's quarters with great reservations. On going there he was surprised to see the ladies eagerly awaiting him. They welcomed him by showering saffron, musk, gold and pearls on him. He was then led to an inside quarter where Sodabeh was seated on a magnificent throne, all decked up and alluring.

When Siyavakhsh came near her, she immediately got down from the throne and caught him in a passionate embrace for a long time and kissed him all over his face and eyes. It was not difficult for Siyavakhsh to understand that this was not motherly love and he uneasily pulled himself away from the embrace. He went back to his father's palace, but did not narrate to him this incident.

In the evening when King Kae Kaus went to the queen's quarters he inquired about Siyavakhsh. Sodabeh praised the young prince and requested the king to get him married to one of the royal ladies in the queen's quarters. The king liked the idea and the next day he called Siyavakhsh conveyed it to him. Siyavakhsh immediately realised that this was Sodabeh's ploy to get him near her and so he guardedly told his father that though he had no reservations against a marriage, he would not like to go to the queen's quarters. King Kae Kaus understood his uneasiness and told him not to misunderstand Sodabeh's affections and finally prevailed upon Siyavakhsh, much to his dislike, to go to the queen's quarters.

Sodabeh once again traps Siyavakhsh :

The next day Sodabeh sent Hirbad to summon Siyavakhsh to the queen's quarters. Siyavakhsh reluctantly went there and was introduced to the royal ladies and princesses, some of whom were King Kae Kaus' brothers Kay Pashin and Kay Arshan's daughters. He was asked to select a bride for himself, which he half-heartedly did.

Thereafter Sodabeh sent away all the royal ladies and once again took Siyavakhsh in an embrace and entreated him to accept her as his queen after the death of his father. Siyavakhsh was horrified at the proposal. The very thought of taking his own stepmother as his wife was revolting to him. However, he realised that if he would outright reject her request, she would seek revenge in one way or the other. So, he asked her to let him be with his bride for the present and assured her that he will keep the offer a secret between the two of them. Thereafter he quickly went away from the queen's quarters.

When the king went to the queen's quarters in the evening he once again inquired about Siyavakhsh. Sodabeh told him that Siyavakhsh had selected a royal princess and agreed for the marriage. King Kae Kaus was happy with the way things were turning out and showed Sodabeh several precious ornaments to be given to Siyavakhsh on his wedding.

Sodabeh wrongly accuses Siyavakhsh :

The next day Sodabeh once again sent for Siyavakhsh and showed him the ornaments he would get on his wedding. She promised him a lot more if he agreed to her proposal. Siyavakhsh explained to her that her proposal meant that she was being unfaithful to his father, and moreover he considered her like a mother.

These wise words from Siyavakhsh enraged Sodabeh. She feared that he may let out her proposals to the king and decided that before he could do anything, she should tarnish his image. Before Siyavakhsh could realise, she tore off her clothes, disheveled her hair, scratched her face and started screaming. Hearing the commotion King Kae Kaus came running to the queen's quarters and inquired the cause behind the commotion.

Siyavakhsh is declared innocent :

Amidst false tears, Sodabeh accused Siyavakhsh of molesting her. Bewildered by this accusation, Siyavakhsh pleaded innocence. King Kae Kaus tested the veracity of Siyavakhsh's innocence by smelling his hands and body. The king knew that Sodabeh was in a habit of dousing herself with perfumes, and if Siyavakhsh had so much as even touched her, the fragrance of rose water and musk should be permeating from him as well. However there was no trace of these fragrances on Siyavakhsh's hand or body and so the king declared him innocent and decided to punish Sodabeh for raising a false hue and cry and attempting to put blemish on the prince's character.

King Kae Kaus, however, had second thoughts on giving punishment to Sodabeh. He was apprehensive that if this news reached her homeland Hamavaran, it would have adverse effects on the relationship between the two countries. Further, he considered her faithfulness and love for all the past years and the children that she had borne and decided to forgive her. However, Sodabeh was not so considerate. She was smarting under the reproach and burning to take revenge on Siyavakhsh who was declared innocent.

A new ploy by Sodabeh :

Sodabeh knew a sorceress who was expecting a child within a few days. She promised her great wealth if she consumed a particular poison and give birth to a stillborn child. The sorceress did accordingly and gave birth to still born twins. Sodabeh took the dead infants near her and started crying out loud as if in great distress. King Kae Kaus hurriedly came to the scene, and was shown the dead infants. Siyavakhsh was blamed for their death. The king could not believe this, and so he took the help of astrologers to ascertain the truth.

The astrologers took seven days to come to the conclusion that the children belonged to a sorceress and not to Sodabeh. The king immediately launched an extensive search and the sorceress was caught. But, she did not confess her sin. On the contrary, Sodabeh blamed Siyavakhsh for threatening the astrologers to give a decision in his favour.

Ordeal by Fire :

Doubts persisted in the king's mind and he was advised to have either Siyavakhsh or Sodabeh undergo the ordeal by fire where a person deemed guilty had to pass over a Fire and emerge unscathed to establish his innocence. When King Kae Kaus put the proposal of an ordeal before the two, Sodabeh rejected it outright, but Siyavakhsh willing accepted to undergo it.

Preparations started for the great ordeal by fire. A hundred camel loads of fire wood was brought and arranged in two mountainous piles next to each other with very little space between them. Then the piles of wood were ignited. There were two towering infernos of flaming wood and Siyavakhsh, with prayers on his lips, prepared to pass in between the two blazing piles on his horse.

Siyavakhsh emerges innocent :

Anticipation was writ large on the faces of all those who had gathered together to witness this unique ordeal. Siyavakhsh entered the blazing inferno, seconds ticked into minutes and the concern on the faces of the onlookers became more and more conspicuous. After heart-rending suspense, Siyavakhsh emerged from the other side, as fresh as a flower without even a trace of char on his face. The surroundings thundered with applause. Exclamations of joy, relief and happiness were heard all around, as the crown prince emerged innocent from the ordeal. The king called for a three day celebration on the occasion of his son being declared innocent in the eyes of men by the divinities.

Siyavakhsh forgives Sodabeh :

After the celebrations were over, King Kae Kaus summoned Sodabeh and ordered her to be put to death for plotting against the prince. However, the devious Sodabeh was not satisfied even after the ordeal. She declared the prince's success in the ordeal to be a result of some magic, which he may have learnt from Zal, father of the great Rustam.

King Kae Kaus was at his wit's end at this dilemma. Unable to decide for himself, he consulted his ministers who unanimously declared Siyavakhsh innocent and pronounced death sentence for Sodabeh. However, the magnanimous Siyavakhsh intervened and requested the king to forgive his stepmother. The king, who was just waiting for an excuse for a soft approach towards Sodabeh immediately agreed and pardoned her. However, the ungrateful Sodabeh continued instigating the king against Siyavakhsh.

Afrasiyab declares a war :

Taking advantage of the internal problems between the king, queen and the prince, Afrasiyab, the wily king of Turan, sent his army across the Jaihun river, which was the border between Iran and Turan right from the times of the Peshdadian king Minocheher. He ordered his army to camp near the city of Balkh.

At first, King Kae Kaus himself decided to go and deal with the invading army, but his advisors prevailed upon him not to go personally, but to send one of his paladins with the army. Siyavakhsh, who was disgusted at the recent happenings, volunteered to take the army and the king was too happy to send his son in command. However, since this was Siyavakhsh's first war as commander, he decided to send Rustam along with him to guide him on his maiden major campaign. Rustam was called for, and he immediately agreed to go along with Siyavakhsh.

The two armies meet :

Soon after, Siyavakhsh and Rustam accompanied by soldiers from various places like Pahlav, Pars, Kuh, Baluchi, Gilan, Zabul, Kabul and Hind set off towards Balkh. The Turanian army with Karsivaz, Barman and Sepehran in command, were waiting near the gates of Balkh. The two armies met in a battle which lasted for four days, at the end of which the Turanian army was routed back.

Siyavakhsh triumphantly entered Balkh, and sent the message of victory to King Kae Kaus. He wrote that the Turanian army had fled back to Turan and asked his father's permission to pursue the army and finish it off.

The king forbade his son from crossing the river and instead asked him to wait on the Iranian side as he expected Afrasiyab to once again send his army with a renewed attack. Siyavakhsh obeyed his father's command and did not pursue the Turanian army.

Afrasiyab calls for a truce :

In Turan, Afrasiyab was furious at the news of his army's retreat. That night he had a terrible dream in which he saw a stretch of barren land filled with snakes and the sky covered by eagles. Amidst such frightening surroundings, an army from Iran swiped through the Turanian camp killing soldiers and taking him prisoner. He was produced in Iran before the king where a young lad of about fourteen years punished him by cutting him into two. When Afrasiyab had the dream interpreted, he was told to avoid the war. Hence he decided to request for a truce and also offered gifts in return.

Immediately the following day, Afrasiyab sent Karsivaz with several gifts and a proposal for truce to Siyavakhsh and Rustam at Balkh. Karsivaz reached Balkh and requested for a truce. After some consideration, the truce was accepted with two conditions. One of the conditions was that Afrasiyab send a hundred of his family as security hostages and a guarantee for the observation of truce. The other condition was that Afrasiyab had to vacate the Iranian lands of Bokhara, Sind, Samarkand and Punjab, which he had previously occupied. Karsivaz sent a messenger to Afrasiyab relaying him the conditions and Afrasiyab reluctantly accepted them and the truce was signed.

King Kae Kaus is displeased :

Rustam decided to go to the king himself to give him the news about the truce and explain to him its benefits. However, when King Kae Kaus heard about the truce he was very angry that an experienced warrior like Rustam had agreed to a truce when victory was in sight. He considered the truce ridiculous and ordered Rustam to go back to Siyavakhsh and ask him to disregard the truce and launch an attack on Afrasiyab.

Rustam tried to explain to the king that they had already received the benefits that they would have got after winning the war. Moreover, Siyavakhsh could not go back on his word. However, the king was adamant. He accused Rustam of misleading Siyavakhsh and being greedy for the gifts sent by Afrasiyab. He called him incompetent to handle this task and instead decided to send Toos to Siyavakhsh.

The king sent a message to Siyavakhsh, reproaching him for taking such an important decision without seeking his permission. He ordered him to launch an attack on Afrasiyab at night and if he was reluctant to initiate an attack, than he was advised to hand over the reins of the army to Toos, who would be joining him in some time. Moreover, King Kae Kaus asked Siyavakhsh to send all the Turanian hostages to him so that he may kill them and seek revenge on Afrasiyab.

Siyavakhsh takes a desperate step :

Siyavakhsh was very displeased at the happenings. All the orders of his father seemed unjust and unfair to him. He would rather forsake his crown and throne, than go back on his promise. He was so disillusioned with his father's autocratic behaviour that he decided to leave Iran forever.

He summoned his commanders Behram and Jang-e-Shavran and informed them of his decision. He dispatched Jang-e-Shavran to Turan sending back with him all the gifts and hostages. He also sought forgiveness from king Afrasiyab, explaining the situation to him and requesting him to help find a way out of this difficulty. To Behram, he entrusted the task of looking after the army till the arrival of Toos. The two commanders tried to dissuade Siyavakhsh from taking such an extreme step, but Siyavakhsh was firm on his resolve.

Afrasiyab welcomes Siyavakhsh :

Jang-e-Shavran went to Turan to return the gifts and hostages, and also to plead for help on behalf of Siyavakhsh. Afrasiyab was very much touched by the nobility of Siyavakhsh and consulted his wise minister Piran as to the course of action. Piran advised the king not only to give refuge to Siyavakhsh but also give him his daughter in wedlock.

Initially, Afrasiyab was apprehensive whether Siyavakhsh would remain faithful to him, but his doubts were soon put to rest by Piran. Afrasiyab sent a message to Siyavakhsh welcoming him to his palace and assured him of fatherly love. He further promised to make him the heir to his Turanian throne and told him that he was free to go back to Iran whenever he wished. This was much more than what Siyavakhsh had expected. Though he had nagging doubts about befriending an enemy, he had no option but to accept the king's invitation.

Siyavakhsh wins over Afrasiyab :

Siyavakhsh sent a letter to his father informing him of his decision and his future course of action and set off for Turan with a few of his trusted soldiers. Piran received him amidst much fanfare and with assurances of loyalty and friendship, which removed any vestige of doubt that Siyavakhsh had regarding his decision to go to Turan. Then he proceeded to the palace.

At the palace, the king himself came to receive his royal guest. Both greeted each other with much warmth and Siyavakhsh was given a palace for himself. The following seven days were spent in celebration. Gradually, Siyavakhsh and Afrasiyab spent more and more time in each other's company. They used to spend days together playing 'Chaugan' (a game similar to golf) and hunting. The two came so close to each other that the king even refused to see anybody except Siyavakhsh.

Siyavakhsh completed a year in Turan, during which time Piran offered him Zarireh, the eldest of his four daughters, in marriage. Siyavakhsh gratefully accepted her as his wife, and the two happily lived with each other.

Siyavakhsh marries Ferangez :

Siyavakhsh's proximity and friendship with Afrasiyab was increasing and Piran thought it fit to suggest Siyavakhsh to marry Ferangez, the daughter of king Afrasiyab. Siyavakhsh was reluctant at this arrangement as he was already married to Zarireh, but Piran insisted that it was politically the correct thing to do and would get him closer to the king. Further, such a marriage was in the interest of Turan as well as Iran. Piran also assured Siyavakhsh that he would explain Zarireh, and she would not mind this union. After much persuasion, Siyavakhsh agreed to marry Ferangez.

The next day, Piran put the proposal of Siyavakhsh's marriage with Ferangez before the king. The king said that he himself was considering such an alliance, but the astrologers had predicted that their progeny could prove to be his nemesis, and so he had not pursued the idea. However, Piran insisted that the progeny of a man as noble as Siyavakhsh could never go against him, and so after much persuasion, Afrasiyab finally agreed to the marriage. Piran conveyed the good tidings to Siyavakhsh, and the marriage took place within a short time followed by a seven-day celebration.

A year passed after the marriage, and Siyavakhsh saw very little of the king during this time. The king sent a messenger to Siyavakhsh and conveyed the message that he had granted him a province till China. Siyavakhsh was very happy at this bequest and within a short time set off to his province with Ferangez and Piran. In this province, he came across a beautiful piece of land where there was a mountain with breath-taking views. Siyavakhsh decided to establish a city and build a garden and a palace over there. He set off on the task and established the city which came to be known as Ganje-Siyavakhsh or Gangdez.

Intuition about the future :

While on the way to Afrasiyab, Siyavakhsh had a flash of intuition that he is banished from the palace and later killed by the king because of somebody's instigation. After his death, a great war would ensue between Iran and Turan. Siyavakhsh told Piran about this intuition, but the wise minister was not ready to believe it. However, Piran started worrying when Siyavakhsh insisted that his intuition was very strong. He felt responsible if any untoward thing might happen, because he was instrumental in getting Siyavakhsh to Turan.

Eight days after this incident, Piran received a message from the king asking him to proceed to provinces between China and Sind to collect taxes from there. He was also instructed to keep his army in the province of Khazar. Piran dutifully set off towards Hind through China.

Establishing of Siyavakhsh-gard :

Siyavakhsh established another city in his province. This city was called Siyavakhsh-gard, and its specialty was the palace, on the walls of which were sculpted figures of the king and warriors of Iran on one side and Turan on the other. This palace became renowned throughout Turan, and even Piran visited the city and later narrated its beauty to king Afrasiyab, who was very pleased at Siyavakhsh's achievements.

Afrasiyab sent his brother Karsivaz to personally go and see Siyavakhsh's new city and congratulate him on his behalf. Karsivaz went to Siyavakhsh-gard where Siyavakhsh received him very warmly. Just at this time, Siyavakhsh received the pleasant news that his first wife Zarireh had delivered a baby boy who was named Farud.

Karsivaz was filled with envy at seeing the riches inside the palace. Even previously he had grudged the happiness and success of Siyavakhsh, as the king was giving too much importance to him, and now he had started giving him parts of his kingdom. He feared that Afrasiyab may give all his wealth to Siyavakhsh, now that he was also his son-in-law. In his treacherous mind he worked out a plan whereby Siyavakhsh would be dishonoured in the eyes of the king.

The following days Siyavakhsh showed great hospitality to Karsivaz. He took him for hunting, Chaugan (golf) and other martial sports. At Karsivaz's request Siyavakhsh even showed his own martial prowess to him. At first Karsivaz requested for a friendly duel, which Siyavakhsh politely declined saying a duel could never be friendly. However, at Karsivaz's insistence he had a duel with Gorvizareh and Damur - two of the best Turanian paladins. Within no time, Siyavakhsh threw them off their saddles and rendered them powerless. Karsivaz was dumbstruck at Siyavakhsh's strength and prowess. After eight days when Karsivaz decided to leave, Siyavakhsh gave a very pleasing and courteous letter to the king. But Karsivaz had already decided to disgrace him and poison the king against him.

Afrasiyab's mind is poisoned :

Afrasiyab was very pleased at Karsivaz's return and eager to know about Siyavakhsh. Karsivaz delivered him Siyavakhsh's letter, but even before the king could read the letter, Karsivaz started instigating the king against Siyavakhsh saying that he was in contact with his father in Iran, and also corresponded with China and Rome seeking their help in planning a revolt against him. He reprimanded the king for putting so much confidence on an Iranian.

The king could not believe his ears, and asked for some time to think over the matter. However, Karsivaz's incessant provocation had their effect, and he started believing his brother. At first, Afrasiyab suggested that Siyavakhsh be sent back to Iran, but Karsivaz advised him against this, saying that would be too dangerous, as he knew all the secrets of Turan.

Thereafter Afrasiyab suggested that Siyavakhsh be invited to the palace so that any misunderstandings may be cleared. But Karsivaz prevented this meeting too by saying that the Iranian prince was too proud to come to him. Afrasiyab now did not see any option open before him and became very pensive. Karsivaz continued poisoning his mind by cooking up false stories against Siyavakhsh. These instigations had the desired effect, and Afrasiyab decided to take action against the young Iranian prince.

Siyavakhsh instigated :

Afrasiyab summoned Karsivaz and asked him to go and investigate Siyavakhsh's palace and also invite him and Ferangez to his palace. Karsivaz went to Siyavakhsh and told him that the king had invited him with his wife. Siyavakhsh at once showed readiness to go and meet the king, but since, Karsivaz did not want this to happen, he started shedding crocodile tears.

On inquiring about the reason of his grief, Karsivaz said that the king was no more well-disposed towards him and had decided to kill him. He further lied to Siyavakhsh that it was for his safety that he forbade him to go to Afrasiyab. At first he was hesitant in accepting Karsivaz's advice, but finally Siyavakhsh fell into the trap and instead of going to Afrasiyab decided to send a letter with Karsivaz informing the king of his inability to meet him because of Ferangez' indifferent health.

Karsivaz, happy that his treacherous plan was succeeding, hastened to the king feigning fright and terror all over his face. When Afrasiyab asked him the reason for his fright, Karsivaz gave him a very distorted picture of Siyavakhsh, saying that he had kept close links with China and Iran and was planning an attack on him in the near future. On hearing this misinformation, Afrasiyab was so furious that he did not even read Siyavakhsh's letter and started preparing for an attack.

Siyavakhsh falls in the trap :

In Siyavakhsh-gard, both Siyavakhsh and Ferangez were very much worried about the turn of events. They could not think of any reason for the king to be furious at them. Moreover, Ferangez was five months pregnant, and to top it all Siyavakhsh had a very frightening dream about a tragic and immediate end to his life and catastrophic future events. Meanwhile Karsivaz sent a message to Siyavakhsh asking him to prepare for a war as Afrasiyab would be attacking him very soon. Seeing his end near, Siyavakhsh started preparing for the inevitable.

At first he bade a tearful farewell to Ferangez. Then he took his trusted black horse Behzad and set him free on the other side of the mountain, because this horse was destined to be the trusted steed of Kae Khushru. Thereafter, he took a small army and set off towards Turan. He met the king and his army along with Karsivaz on the way.

When Karsivaz met Siyavakhsh, he showed surprise on his face and asked him the reason for his coming to the king with an army. It did not take long for Siyavakhsh to realise that the treacherous Karsivaz had trapped him with an army in order to create enmity between him and the king. The king was now convinced that Siyavakhsh had truly revolted against him. Siyavakhsh cried and pleaded to have a word with the king, but the villainous Karsivaz did not allow this, and told the king that it would be inappropriate for him to talk with his enemy.

As a last ditch attempt to convince the king of his innocence, Siyavakhsh did not touch his weapons and even forbade his soldiers to fight against the Turanians, but the king was

too steeped in anger to see such nobility. He wrecked a full-scale massacre on the helpless Iranian soldiers and killed most of them.

Death of Siyavakhsh :

Siyavakhsh was captured alive and Afrasiyab ordered to have him killed mercilessly. Pilsam, the youngest brother of Afrasiyab tried to bring some sense into the king against such thoughtless and suicidal action. As the king was having second thoughts, Karsivaz called him fickle minded, which provoked the king in persisting with his order.

Ferangez, who had learnt about the king's orders, came running to him beseeching and entreating not to take such a cruel step. But the king instead of having sympathy towards his daughter, directed his ire towards her and had her imprisoned in a secluded room in the palace.

The king then ordered Karsivaz to take Siyavakhsh to a secluded spot and have him killed. Karsivaz entrusted this task to his henchman Gorvizareh, who yoked Siyavakhsh by the neck and mercilessly dragged him for miles. Then he was taken to a secluded spot where his head was severed from his body. The plant known as 'Khun-e-Siyavush' (the maiden hair fern) grew at the place where his blood touched the ground.

The news of Siyavakhsh's death spread fast. His queens and subjects lamented in agony. Ferangez tore her hair and scratched her face. She openly cursed her father, who, enraged, ordered her to be beaten mercilessly and thrown out of the palace, so that the child of Siyavakhsh that she was carrying may die too.

Just then, Piran, who had heard about the king's order, came in a hurry hoping to save the Iranian prince. However, he was shattered when he realised that he was too late. Before he had time to lament, he came to know about the heartless treatment being meted out to Ferangez, and he hastened to the palace where he saw Ferangez, being mercilessly dragged by her hair.

On seeing this sorry plight of Ferangez, Piran reprimanded the king for his inconsiderate decisions. He somehow convinced the king to release Ferangez and send her to his house. He even assured him that the child will be brought to him soon after the birth. With these assurances he took the grieving Ferangez with him to Khotan.

Kae Khushru's birth :

After some time, Siyavakhsh appeared in Piran's dream and told him that very soon his son, who will be the future King Kae Khushru, will be born. True enough, that very night, Ferangez gave birth to a baby boy. On seeing the child, Piran remembered the dream. He realised that the child was to be the future king of Iran and did not hand him over to Afrasiyab.

Piran handed over the infant to the peasants of Kalu mountains along with a wet nurse and other essential requirements, and asked them to take great care of the child and not to reveal its identity to anyone. As the infant grew into a child of seven, he was bold

enough to hunt deers. By the age of ten he started hunting boars and foxes. But, when he started hunting lions and leopards, the shepherds started worrying as the child was their responsibility, and so they complained about his reckless bravery to Piran.

Child Kae Khushru and Afrasiyab :

Piran decided that time was ripe to bring Kae Khushru back from the peasants, and so he went to the Kalu Mountains and brought him back to his palace. When Afrasiyab came to know that Piran had a grown up child in his palace, he asked him to bring the child to his palace. Piran informed the king that the child was the son of Siyavakhsh, and for good measure added that the child was mentally retarded. He agreed to bring the child to the palace, but only after extracting a promise from the king that he would not harm him.

Piran, then told the child that for his own safety he would have to act like a mentally retarded child before the king, and started training him accordingly. The smart child immediately picked up the instructions, and the following day he played his part to the hilt in front of king Afrasiyab. He gave totally incongruous and absurd answers to questions asked by the king. The king was convinced that his grandchild was mentally retarded and would not pose any threat to him in future, as predicted. He ordered that the child and his mother be sent back to their palace in Siyavakhsh-gard and given whatever necessities they required.

Relieved, Piran took the necessary things from the treasury and sent Ferangez and Kae Khushru to their palace in Siyavakhsh-gard after making the desolate palace habitable once again.

Avenging Siyavakhsh's death :

After a long time King Kae Kaus came to know about his son Siyavakhsh's death and the ruthless manner in which he was killed. He became miserable and grieved his son's death for a long time, and so did the other paladins of Iran. In Zabulistan, Rustam, Zal, Faramarz and Zavareh too were shocked at the merciless death of Siyavakhsh.

After eight days of mourning, Rustam immediately gathered armies from Kabul and Kashmir and pledged not to rest till he avenged Siyavakhsh's death. He went to the king and at first offered his condolences, but then reprimanded him for forcing his son in such a dangerous predicament. Thereafter, he went into the queen's quarters, dragged out Sodabeh and instantly killed her, as she was directly responsible for Siyavakhsh's death. King Kae Kaus did not object at all to the punishment meted out to Sodabeh.

War between Iran and Turan :

Thereafter Rustam took out the Iranian flag 'Drafsh-e-Kavyani', and along with his son Faramarz and a hundred thousand strong army marched towards Turan. On the way when Faramarz was passing through the province of Se-Panjab, its ruler Varazad tried to stop his way. However, within no time, Faramarz over-powered him.

When Afrasiyab came to know about the approaching Iranian army under Rustam, he realised that the prophecies regarding Turan's destruction by Iran may soon be coming

true. He too started preparing for the war and spared no expenses in equipping his army and giving them handsome remuneration. He sent his army under his son Surkheh to counter Faramarz. The two met in war and Surkheh was taken prisoner. Faramarz took him to his father who ordered him to be killed in exactly the same manner in which Siyavakhsh was killed. When news of Surkheh's death reached Afrasiyab, he pledged not to rest till he avenged the death of his son. In the battles that ensued Afrasiyab's brother Pilsam was also killed.

The next day Afrasiyab and Rustam met in the battlefield. Rustam succeeded in putting Afrasiyab off his saddle and was about to hoist him by his waist-band, when the Turanian commander Homan came to his king's rescue. He swung his mace near Rustam's shoulder which distracted the great warrior and Afrasiyab made good his escape. Next day, the terrified Afrasiyab fled with his retreating armies towards China.

As the other prophecies were coming true, Afrasiyab was now afraid that even the prophecy regarding him being killed by his grandson may come true, and so he summoned Piran and instructed him to throw young Kae Khushru into the waters. Piran, however, pleaded with the king not to have the child drowned, but instead leave him in the forests of Khotan to fend for himself. In this way, he assured the king, that he will not be guilty of killing an innocent retarded child. Afrasiyab agreed to the idea, and so Piran sent a wise messenger to accompany Kae Khushru and leave him on the other side of the sea of China. He secretly instructed the messenger to give him items of immediate necessity like food, clothes, bedding, tents and horses.

Rustam occupies the throne of Turan:

When Afrasiyab fled towards China, Rustam went into his palace, occupied the throne and distributed his wealth. He divided kingdom among his trusted paladins. The provinces of Se-Panjab and Sughdha were given to Gudarz, and Chegal and Khata to Ashkash. Fariburz, brother of Siyavakhsh, was given lots of jewels and crowns. When the kings of Machin and China came to know that Rustam has occupied the throne of Turan, they too came to pledge their allegiance to him. After settling things down, Rustam decided to relax and he and his family members started pursuing their favourite sport of hunting.

Once when Zavareh had gone hunting, his escort showed him the favourite hunting spot of Siyavakhsh, and that brought back bitter memories of the death of the Iranian prince and reminded him of the purpose for which they had come to Turan. Zavareh went to Rustam and reprimanded him saying that they had not come to Turan to be in the good books of people and relax and enjoy over there, but to seek revenge. Rustam realised that he had totally forgotten the purpose for which he had come to Turan, and in an angry reaction went on a rampage killing men, burning palaces and forests and instructing his soldiers to do the same.

The elderly people of Turan came to Rustam and requested him not to punish them for the sins of their evil king. Rustam realised the folly of this wanton destruction and asked his soldiers to stop the rampage.

Rustam returns to Iran :

A wise priest reminded Rustam that it was six years since they had left Iran and the old king Kae Kaus was all alone in Iran. Rustam realised that his king would need him, and soon left Turan.

Afrasiyab returns to Turan :

As soon as Afrasiyab got the news of Rustam's departure from Turan he returned to his homeland and was shocked to see the large scale destruction. He vowed to take revenge and mobilised his armies and attacked Iran with a vengeance and continued his assault for seven long years.

The Search For Kae Khushru

Gudarz dreams of Kae Khushru :

One night the patriarch warrior Gudarz had a dream in which the divinity Sarosh, perched on a cloud, told him that there is only one person who can bring an end to the bad days of Iran, and that person was Kae Khushru who was presently in Turan. Sarosh Yazad further added that only his son Giv would be able to go and fetch him.

Next morning, the ecstatic Gudarz summoned Giv and recounted the dream to him. Giv realised that the task was as difficult as searching for a pin in a blazing hay-stack, however, for the sake of his beloved country he readily accepted the challenge and started making preparations for his secret journey to Turan. He first met his wife, briefed her of his mission and its risks, but showed confidence that he was capable of going there and fetching the young prince. His wife Banu Goshasp willingly agreed, wished him success on his mission and sought permission to stay with her father Rustam in the meanwhile.

Toos sets off in search :

After seeing off his wife, and keeping his young son Bizan in custody of his father Gudarz, Giv set off on his dangerous mission. He went all alone, in order not to arouse suspicion of the Turanians. Once in Turan, he assumed a disguise and carried off inquiries in great secrecy. For seven years he roamed through the length and breadth of Turan, among cities and forests to look for Kae Khushru but could not find him.

Giv, sitting on the green plains near a river, was greatly disappointed that he was not able to find the prince. He started doubting the veracity of his father's dream and contemplated abandoning his search. Just then, he saw a radiant youth sitting by the river, and instinctively he recognised him as Kae Khushru. As he approached him, to his utter surprise, the youth addressed him by his name and said that he knew his purpose for coming to Turan.

Giv was ecstatic at having found the prince, but just to be doubly sure, he asked to see the black mark on his forearm, which is a characteristic of all Kayanian kings. Kae Khushru showed him the mark, which convinced Giv that his search had come to a fruitful end. Both of them set off for Siyavakhsh-gard to meet Feranghez.

Ferangez was overjoyed at seeing a warrior from Iran, and immediately the three of them decided to leave Turan. But before leaving, they had to accomplish the mission of taking back with them their trusted horse Behzad, whom Siyavakhsh had specially kept for his son. Ferangez requested Giv to go with Kae Khushru to the other side of the mountain and look for Behzad among the flocks of grazing horses. She gave Kae Khushru the saddle and reins that his father was using and told him to show it to the horses and Behzad would immediately recognise these and come to him.

When Giv and Kae Khushru went to the other side of the mountain, it was not difficult for them to spot the stately black coloured Behzad. The horse too immediately recognised the saddle as well as his master's young son who closely resembled his father. The horse started nuzzling Kae Khushru with great love and affection, tears streaming down his eyes. Seeing the love of this animal, the two lion hearted men too could not stop tears trickling down their face. After this happy re-union, Behzad was saddled and Kae Khushru rode him and came to his palace along with Giv. In the palace Ferangez asked Giv to select whatever he wanted from the treasury. Giv selected Siyavakhsh's armour and other requisites, which would be needed for their flight back to Iran.

Kae Khushru proceeds to Iran :

After equipping themselves adequately, the three set off towards Iran through the forest. However, inspite of the dire secrecy carried off through this mission, news of the flight of Kae Khushru reached Piran and fearing Afrasiyab's wrath at Kae Khushru's escape he set off his soldiers in pursuit of the trio. Though the soldiers caught up with the fleeing warriors, they were no match for the mighty Giv, who fought them off and drove them back.

Seeing the disgraceful return of his soldiers, Piran himself set off in their pursuit with six thousand soldiers. The three were resting on the other side of river Gul-zaryun, when Giv saw the Turanian soldiers approaching. He convinced Kae Khushru to continue along with Ferangez towards Iran, as his life was far too precious, and Giv waited to fight off the approaching army on the banks of river.

When Piran crossed over the river, Giv easily defeated him. Seeing the ignoble plight of their leader most of the Turanian soldiers fled even without trying to cross the river. Giv tightly fettered Piran and dragged him to Kae Khushru and Ferangez. He was about to kill the Turanian commander when he requested Kae Khushru and his mother to intervene on his behalf. The two interceded and requested Giv to leave him off as he had saved them on several occasions. Piran was released, but only after being secured tightly on his horse. Piran returned to Turan and on the way met Afrasiyab who too was going in pursuit of Kae Khushru. He was amazed at the sheer power of Giv, who could wreak such havoc not only on one of his best warriors but his 6000 strong army.

Kae Khushru rides the waters :

Tired and exhausted, Kae Khushru, Ferangez and Giv reached the river Jaihun, which was the boundary between Turan and Iran. Now they had to just cross the river to be in

their own homeland. They approached the boatman and asked him to ferry them across the water. The greedy boatman seeing them desperately in trouble asked one of them to be his slave, without realising who he was talking with. Giv was outraged by this offensive demand. He asked Kae Khushru to try and ride over the waters of the river, as King Faridun had done over the Arvand river, since he too had the divine authority of an Iranian monarch. Kae Khushru prayed to God and rode on the waters and Ferangez and Giv followed suit. By divine grace all of them crossed the river in this manner and safely reached Iran.

The boatman was crestfallen at his stupid demand, and immediately went to apologise to them, but Giv did not accept his apology, and so with a heavy heart he returned to his post at the Turanian banks. When Afrasiyab came on the banks of Jaihun, he approached the boatman and inquired about the threesome. The boatman recounted the miraculous incident and Afrasiyab sighed at his own misfortune of missing his prey and decided to follow them into Iran, but his commander Homan advised him against going into the Iranian territory and so, disappointed, they had to return to Turan.

Kae Khushru reaches Iran :

The news of the return of Giv along with Kae Khushru and Ferangez spread like wild-fire throughout Iran and sent waves of jubilation, joy and happiness in the hearts of all Iranians. Gudarz warmly welcomed them, and they stayed there for seven days. After taking some rest and attending celebrations they proceeded to meet King Kae Kaus.

King Kae Kaus welcomed them with an open heart and spared no pains in praising Giv for accomplishing such a dangerous mission. He was gifted with titles of lands of Khorasan, Rae, Kam and Esfahan. Ferangez too was provided with a special palace and comforts befitting a queen. Preparations were undertaken to announce Kae Khushru as the next king of Iran.

Test For The New King

Toos objects :

Toos, the well-known paladin and son of the Peshdadian king Navdar, objected at Kae Khushru being appointed the king, because of his young age and Turanian ancestry from his mother's side. He preferred Fariburz, the elder son of King Kae Kaus as the king. However, Gudarz wanted Kae Khushru as the king.

This resulted in enmity between Toos and Gudarz. The two paladins were on the verge of a war when they decided to consult King Kae Kaus in this matter. The king suggested that he would give his throne to the one who is successful in winning the fort of 'Bahman Dez' in Ardbil near Azarbaizan.

Fariburz goes to Bahman Dez :

Toos, with lots of soldiers, accompanied Fariburz in his attempt to win the fort of Bahman Dez. This fort was no ordinary fort, but a fort on which people with magical

powers lived. The fort was perpetually surrounded by fire. There was so much heat around it that no animal or man could go near it. Moreover, the fort was high up on the mountain, and the route leading to it was shrouded amidst treacherous forests. Thus at daytime the heat that did not allow a person to climb it, and at night it was impossible to navigate the dense forests. Fariburz and Toos tried for seven days to find their way up. They were finally frustrated and returned back to Iran.

Kae Khushru goes to Bahman Dez :

When Gudarz came to know about the unsuccessful campaign of Fariburz, he prepared Kae Khushru and his son Giv to go to the fort of Bahman Dez. The three set off with a few select soldiers and a strategy in their mind, and reached the base of the fort. As night drew near, Kae Khushru wrote a message asking the commander of the fort of Bahman Dez to surrender, attached it to a special spear and shot the spear into the fort from the base of the mountain.

As soon as the special spear reached the fort, it shattered its magical defense. Kae Khushru then asked his soldiers to shower arrows into the fort from the base, and the soldiers inside the fort soon started falling to the arrows. Then a bright radiant light came from nowhere. It cut the darkness of the night and guided the horse of Kae Khushru into the fort. Kae Khushru recognised this light to be a special form of fire from Ahura Mazda. He called it Gushasp, as it had guided him by staying near the ears (gush) of his horse (asp). In Bahman Dez itself, Kae Khushru had this fire duly enthroned as the fire of Azar Gushasp. A triumphant Kae Khushru then returned to Iran

Toos apologises to Kae Khushru :

As the news of Kae Khushru's success reached people, paladins came from all directions to congratulate him. Toos felt humiliated and expected his days as a paladin to be numbered. He came to Kae Khushru, apologised to him and volunteered to resign from his position. However, Kae Khushru forgave him and asked him to continue on his position, as whatever he had done was in the interests of Iran and with noble intentions. Thereafter, Kae Khushru proceeded to Pars to meet his father King Kae Kaus.

3. KING KAE KHUSHRU

Kae Khushru is coronated :

King Kae Kaus welcomed Kae Khushru, made him sit on his throne, placed a crown on his head and himself sat on a smaller throne next to him, thus handing over the reigns of his kingdom to his triumphant son.

At the news of the coronation of Kae Khushru spread, all the neighbouring kings sent congratulatory messages and gifts and accepted him as their king. On the other hand, a chilling terror ran down the spine of the king of Turan and his allies.

Rustam and his father Zal too decided to go to offer respects to their new king. When King Kae Khushru came to know that the renowned warriors Rustam and Zal were coming he became very happy, as Rustam was his father Siyavakhsh's preceptor. As per

the custom of those times, he sent the senior paladins Gudarz, Giv and Toos to receive them. When they were brought to the palace, King Kae Khushru showered respect and reverence on the senior paladins.

King Kae Khushru tours his country :

King Kae Khushru, with all his senior paladins, then set off to inspect his kingdom. His first stop was at Azarbaizan where he paid respects to the fire Azar-Goshasp at Bahman Dez. Thereafter, he toured his entire country and witnessed widespread pain and misery all around on account of the afflictions inflicted by Afrasiyab. The king decided to avenge his country's desolation and his father's death. His paladins promised their whole-hearted support in this brave endeavour.

War With Turan

Paladins are assigned tasks :

In anticipation of the war, Kae Khushru asked his paladins to take over certain tasks. The first task, to behead Palasham, a Turanian warrior was undertaken by Bizan. The second task of defeating Afrasiyab's trusted commander Tazav and bringing alive his sorceress consort Aspenui, was also undertaken by Bizan. Giv undertook the next two tasks, of killing Tazav and burning the wooden barricades at Kaserud, the strategic entry point to Turan.

The last task, to take a message of the king to Afrasiyab was undertaken by Gurgin. In the message, King Kae Khushru had asked Afrasiyab to hand Gorvizareh, Karsivaz, Damur and all others who were responsible for Siyavakhsh's death over to him, or be prepared for a war. All the paladins who undertook the tasks were rewarded with rich gifts of furs, clothes, silk, gold, jewels and maids.

As the king assigned the tasks, Rustam approached him with his son Faramarz and brother Zavareh. He informed him that the two provinces of Kashmir and Kanauj adjoining Zabulistan and stretching till Sindh in Hindustan, which belonged to Iran since the time of king Minocheher, were taken over by the Turanians in the later part of King Kae Kaus's reign and should now be reclaimed. King Kae Khushru assigned Rustam the responsibility of retrieving these two provinces by sending an army under Faramarz.

The king advised Faramarz not to indulge into senseless bloodshed. He instructed him to attack only those who oppose him and not harm the people who submit to him. He promised Faramarz the kingship of those provinces if he retrieved them back from the Turanians.

Next, Kae Khushru prepared an army for attacking Turan by summoning battalions from other provinces. The army comprised of leaders of different provinces, each with their own flags and battle motifs of animals like lion, wolf, panther, deer, boar, tiger, sheep, dragon, elephant, Homa bird, eagle and also of the sun and the moon.

The Episode Of Farud

Toos is appointed commander :

King Kae Khushru appointed Toos as the commander of the army, which was to go to Turan. However, Toos was cautioned not to go by the easier mountainous route, which went through Kalat, but to go by the arduous route, which went through the forests.

The reason for this was that Kalat was ruled by Farud, King Kae Khushru's step brother (son of Siyavakhsh and Zarireh), who was staying there along with his mother. Since Farud did not know any commanders from Iran, Kae Khushru feared that he may challenge the Iranian army resulting in a senseless catastrophe. Toos agreed to go by the route suggested by the king, but on the way he changed his mind, and in spite of being warned by Gudarz, he took the easier route through Kalat.

When the Iranian army approached the mountain, Farud saw the oncoming army and consulted his mother about his course of action. His mother Zarireh guessed that this must be an Iranian army going to Turan to seek revenge for the death of Siyavakhsh, and so she advised him to befriend the Iranian commanders and join hands with them in seeking revenge for his father. Farud was hesitant, as he did not know any Iranian commanders, but his mother pacified him by saying that he should meet the warriors Behram and Jang-e-Shavran who intimately knew his father and knew all about him.

Zarireh instructed Farud to go with his trusted warrior Tokhar who knew most of the Iranian commanders. When Farud and Tokhar went on the top of Sepand Mountain to see if they could spot any friendly Iranian commanders, Toos saw them and asked his commander Behram to go and verify their identities.

When Farud saw Behram approaching, he went to him and introduced himself. Behram was very happy to meet the son of his former chief Siyavakhsh. He made sure of Farud's identity by seeing the black birthmark on his arm, a sign of Kayanian royalty and indicated his willingness to help him.

Farud asked Behram to invite Toos and other Iranian commanders for a feast, but Behram knowing Toos's dislike for King Kae Khushru and his relatives told him that Toos would reject his invitation. Before leaving, he cautioned Farud by saying that he was sure Toos will be displeased if he established good relations with him, so if instead of him another warrior came, he had to be prepared to defend himself.

Toos attacks Farud :

True enough, when Behram returned and revealed the identity of the warrior on the mountain and extended his invitation, Toos was furious at him for befriendng an enemy. He castigated him for not following his orders, and instead sent his son-in-law Rivniz to go and finish off the warrior of King Kae Khushru's family.

Farud, who was waiting on top of the mountain for the return of Behram, became alert when he saw another warrior charging towards him. Heeding Behram's warning, he shot an arrow from the top and killed Rivniz. When Rivniz's horse went down without its

rider, Toos realised that his son-in-law was killed. He was furious and sent his son Zarasp to kill Farud, but he too was killed while on his way up, and his horse returned without the rider.

Toos humiliated by Farud :

The anger of Toos knew no bounds at the death of his two near and dear ones. In order to avenge their deaths, he himself proceeded towards the mountain hideout. As Farud was about to make Toos his next target, Tokhar intervened.

“What are you upto ?” He asked Farud.

“I am about to claim my third Iranian victim.”

“Don’t do that,” cautioned Tokhar. “He is the commander of the Iranian army, and the whole army will be on your back if you kill him. Just kill his horse, and he will have to return.” Farud did like wise and Toos had to retreat in disgrace.

On seeing their commander walking back in humiliation, the whole Iranian army was upset. “Let me go and teach this young upstart a lesson,” thundered Giv. He went up the mountain, but he too had to return in disgrace without his horse, like Toos. These insults, heaped by one person, were too much for the Iranian army to bear. Bizan swore to avenge these humiliations even at the cost of his life and stormed on to the mountain.

When Farud saw Bizan coming towards him, he shot his horse too. Undaunted, Bizan valiantly climbed the mountain on foot. Farud saw Bizan fearlessly coming towards him, but he did not like to take the risk of killing yet another Iranian warrior, and so he rushed back inside his fort. Disappointed and angered, Bizan went down the mountain and informed Toos about the happenings.

Toos attacks Farud :

Toos had by now decided to storm the fort and seek revenge for all the deaths and humiliations heaped upon them. The following day, he prepared a huge army and attacked the fort, which was obstructing their march to Turan. Farud, with his meager army tried his best to defend himself, his mother and queens, but the huge Iranian army easily outnumbered his handful of soldiers.

Single handed Farud killed many Iranian soldiers. Exhausted, at the end of a grueling day when he was about to go back into the fort, the incensed Bizan and Rohham attacked him together. He valiantly fought them and managed to flee inside the fort but he was fatally wounded. The queens inside the fort panicked at seeing the blood soaked Farud scampering inside the fort.

Tragic end to Farud’s life:

Farud, mortally wounded, was still in his senses. “Be prepared to give up your lives, rather than be humiliated by the enemies,” said he to his queens. “Jump off the mountains before the Iranian army storms into the fort.” As these words were coming out of his mouth, life slipped out of the pale and enfeebled body of Farud.

As soon as Farud's body lay limp, his queens jumped off the fort's balcony into the valley. Farud's mother Zarireh, determined at not leaving anything in the hands of the attackers, set fire to all the treasures. Then she went near the lifeless body of her son, took his dagger and ended her life with it.

When the Iranians entered the fort, a heavy gloom set over all the great warriors at the sight of the carnage that they had created. Behram, in particular, grieved a lot as the innocent and friendly Farud had died a death much worse than his father Siyavakhsh. Other senior paladins like Giv and Gudarz too castigated Toos for his recklessness. The short tempered Toos was now repentant for being the cause of this massive tragedy. As a mark of respect for Farud, they erected a Dakhma on top of Mount Sepand and placed therein the bodies of all the royal departed ones, including Rivniz and Zarasp.

Wars Between Iran And Turan

Iranian army faces obstacles :

The Iranian army, with a heavy heart, proceeded to Kaserud through the town of Jeram. On the way they had to confront the mighty Turanian warrior Palasham. The Iranian army was caught in a blizzard, and it could proceed only after seven days when the blizzard subsided. Before reaching Turan they had yet to surmount many obstacles like the mountain high wooden barricades of Kaserud and the fort of the evil Tazav at Gerevgard.

The Iranian army encountered huge pieces of wood used as barricades by the Turanians. The resourceful Giv, powerfully shot a blazing arrow in such a way that the entire barricade started flaming. So huge was the barricade that it kept burning for 3 weeks, and the Iranian army was able to proceed only after it cooled down.

Fight with the evil Tazav :

The Iranian army moved on and camped near Gerevgard, where stayed the evil Tazav, a stooge of Afrasiyab who raised horses for him. When Tazav came to know that the Iranian army was camping nearby, he sent his spy Kabudah to go there and get information, so that he can then perpetrate 'Shab-e-khun' (massacre at night).

The night was so dark, that it was difficult for Behram, who was on guard, to see anything. Unfortunately for Kabudah, his horse neighed, and Behram realised that something was amiss. He immediately shot an arrow in the direction of the sound, which pierced Kabudah, and he fell lifeless on the ground. When Kabudah did not return in the morning, Tazav realised that something might have gone amiss. He took a small army and along with his two warriors Arzang and Mardui proceeded towards the Iranian camp.

The watch-soldiers in the Iranian camp gave information of the approach of a small army, and Giv and Bizan set off to confront it with a few of their soldiers. A battle ensued in which Arzang was killed and Tazav managed to escape by the skin of his teeth. However, Bizan followed him in order to kill him and fulfil his promise to King Kae Khushru.

Aspenui is taken prisoner :

While fleeing, Tazav passed his fort, where his consort Aspenui stopped him and requested him to take her along with him. Though Tazav knew that his horse was exhausted and would not be able to take the weight of two riders, he felt pity on her and took her along with him. However, on the way they came across a deep and wide gorge, which the overtired horse was not able to negotiate with the two riders.

Aspenui got down on the condition that Tazav would send help from Turan. However, before Tazav could send help, Bizan reached there, took Aspenui as a prisoner and brought her to the Iranian camp. By that time the Iranian soldiers entered Tazav's fort, replenished their food supply, ammunition and horses and rested there for some time.

Turanian army attacks :

When Tazav reached Turan, he gave Afrasiyab the message that the Iranian army was very close to the capital. Afrasiyab immediately commanded Piran to prepare an army. Piran, prepared a hundred thousand strong army, sections of which were entrusted to Barman, Tazav and Nastihan. Piran led the army to Gerevgard through a short secret route into Tazav's fort and took the Iranian army, by surprise at night.

The Iranian army was totally over-confident. They had neither guards nor riders on duty. Taking advantage of this situation, Piran launched a dastardly attack and perpetrated Shab-e-khun (massacre at night). Nobody, except Giv was vigilant. He immediately woke up at the commotion and alerted Toos, Gudarz and Bizan. But the Iranians were in no condition to defend themselves. Two-thirds of the army was killed and most of the others were badly injured. Some fled the scene and hid in the nearby Kaserud Mountains. Before morning, the Turanian army returned back. This massacre became well known in Iranian history as the Jang-e-Pashan. A detailed report of the entire campaign was sent to their king.

King Kae Khushru was very sad on hearing the news of the death of his brother Farud. He was also enraged at Toos for the irresponsible and arrogant manner in which he conducted the affairs as the commander of the Iranian army.

He sent a letter to Fariburz to sack Toos from his position and send him back to Iran. He also asked him to take command of the Iranian army and make Gudarz his advisor and Giv the spearhead of the attack. When Fariburz received the letter, he convened a meeting of the senior paladins, where everybody appreciated the wisdom of the king and acted accordingly.

As per the king's commands, Toos handed over the reigns of the army to Fariburz and went to him. He was imprisoned for disobeying the king and killing Farud. Meanwhile, Fariburz the new commander of the Iranian army sent Gudarz's son Rohham to the Turanian commander Piran seeking a month's respite from war till the wounded soldiers recovered. Piran agreed to the request with the condition that the Iranian army be taken out of Turan.

After a month, the war resumed, in which the Iranian army suffered heavy losses and had to retreat. Gudarz and Giv rallied back the Iranian army and launched a fresh attack, but once again the Iranians were badly beaten and King Kae Kaus' son Rivniz lost his life.

Death of Behram :

Behram noticed that he had lost his favourite horsewhip and went to get it back from the battlefield, despite being advised against it by his father Gudarz and brother Giv. He was able to retrieve the horsewhip, but lost his horse in the process. When he was returning by foot to his camp, Piran recognised him and sent his son Ruin with a few soldiers to capture him alive. Ruin went near Behram and conveyed him his father's message, but instead of going with them, Behram started shooting arrows at them and many Turanian soldiers were killed.

Ruin retreated back with the remaining soldiers and Piran himself came to Behram requesting him to come to the Turanian camp, because now since he had killed many of his soldiers he could not be allowed to return to Iran. Behram, however, refused to go with him.

The Turanian warrior Tazav had a personal enmity with Behram. When he came to know that Behram was trapped in the Turanian camp, he came with a group of soldiers and attacked him. Behram single handedly fought them for a long time. When Tazav realised that it would not be possible to over-power Behram, he adopted a cowardly approach. He sneaked from behind and delivered a deadly blow, which grievously injured Behram. Bleeding profusely he lay there dying. But before falling, he severed the hand of Tazav, which had delivered the blow.

When Behram did not return for a long time, Giv went out with Bizan to look for him. After a long search they spotted a pale Behram who was on the verge of death. When he saw his brother Giv, he was overjoyed, and in his dying breath conveyed to his brother the heroic way in which he had faced the Turanians and the cowardly manner in which Tazav wounded him.

An enraged Giv immediately set out to the Turanian camp where he spotted Tazav on the outskirts of the camp. He threw a lasso at him and dragged him to where Behram lay dying. A terrified Tazav cried and pleaded for mercy, but the enraged Giv severed his head from his body. Soon thereafter, Behram passed away. His body was ceremoniously placed in a Dakhma specially built for him by Giv and Bizan.

Iranian army retreats :

Several deaths in the Iranian camp had left the army grieving and demoralised. Hence Fariburz decided to retreat to Iran via Kaserud. When Piran got this news he was overjoyed. He immediately conveyed it to Afrasiyab, who called for a celebration. The Turanian army returned back home and after two weeks Piran too left for his hometown Khotan, richly rewarded by his king. However, whilst leaving, Afrasiyab cautioned Piran to be on the alert, as there was a possibility that the Iranian army under Rustam may soon launch an attack.

The Iranian king was very angry with all his senior warriors for the way in which they had conducted themselves during this war, killed his brother Farud and returned defeated. He was contemplating a very stern punishment for Toos who was in the prison, when Rustam intervened and requested the king to forgive him.

Toos was summoned, and he apologised to the king. He explained that he was blind with grief on account of his son Zarasp and son-in-law Rivniz's deaths and hence had acted harshly. He asked for one more opportunity to show his loyalty and commitment to the king by being sent with the next expedition to Turan. The king relented after conferring with his senior warriors and allowed Toos to lead the army to Turan along with Giv.

Iranian army again goes for war :

Toos proceeded with his army towards the river Shahad. Piran was not yet ready for war, so when he came to know about this, he sent a message to Toos requesting him to be spared, as he had always been helpful to the Iranians. Toos replied that if he pledged his loyalty to Iran, not only will he be spared, but he will also be rewarded with crown and throne. The shrewd Piran, in order to buy some time, sent a message to Toos that he will accept King Kae Khushru's sovereignty and will shortly come to him with a few of his men.

In the meanwhile, Piran sent a messenger to Afrasiyab appraising him of the situation and requesting him to send immediate help. Afrasiyab lost no time and dispatched an army, which reached Piran within ten days, and Piran launched an attack on the unsuspecting Iranian army. There was heavy causality on both sides. Toos killed the well-known Turanian warrior Arzang, son of Zareh and also fought with the Turanian commander Homan in which the Turanian's horse was wounded. Toos was about to get Homan, when he slipped away due to the onset of dusk.

Bazur the Turanian magician :

The Iranian army had to contend with the newly replenished Turanian army, which was more than two hundred times larger than them. But despite the enormous size of their army, the Turanians were not confident and so they instructed Bazur the magician to go atop a mountain and blow cold winds and snowstorm over the Iranian army. The Iranians were taken by surprise at this unexpected calamity. Many soldiers died and the rest started fleeing. The senior warriors started praying to God.

Just then, out of nowhere, a saintly man appeared, and pointed to Rohham the place on the mountain from where Bazur was weaving his magic. Rohham immediately went atop the mountain, cut off the magician's hands, dragged him down and killed him in front of the Iranian army. The snowstorm subsided with the death of the magician. However, the damage was already done as most of the soldiers had already fled.

Iranian camp is relocated :

There were heavy casualties among the Iranians. Those who died were put to rest and the injured were given treatment. Toos relocated the rest of his army on Mount Hamavan and

sent a message to the king requesting him to urgently send more troops, preferably with Rustam.

The following day, the Turanian army was overjoyed to see the Iranian camp empty. However, Piran and Homan stopped them short of their celebration to inflict a last fatal blow on the Iranian army before it could replenish itself. They sent Lahhak with two hundred soldiers for investigation, who spotted the Iranian army on Mount Hamavan and informed Piran accordingly.

Piran immediately dispatched Homan with a thirty thousand strong army, and assured him that he will soon follow them. The Turanian army gathered at the foot of the mountain, laid a siege around it and prevented the flow of supplies to the army on top.

After several days, the Iranians were desperate for supplies and so they decided to take on the Turanian army at night. After dark, Toos, Giv and Rohham, bravely launched an attack on the Turanian camp with a few soldiers. They wreaked havoc during the darkness, and by morning, they were already in their camp on the mountain.

King Kae Khushru sends help :

In Iran, King Kae Khushru sent a message to Rustam appraising him of the situation and requesting him to go to help Toos. Rustam immediately relented and went from Zabulistan to Iran. King Kae Khushru asked Rustam to select thirty thousand soldiers of his choice and dispatch them to Mount Hamavan under Fariburz. He also told Rustam to join the army as soon as possible. Before leaving, Fariburz expressed to Rustam his desire to marry his brother Siyavakhsh's widow Ferangez. After some persuasion from Rustam, Ferangez agreed to the marriage. Three days after the marriage, Fariburz and Rustam set off towards Mount Hamavan.

Homan, reeling under the attack of the previous night, was preparing to attack the Iranians. However, Piran felt that there was no need for a war, because the Iranians would themselves surrender due to shortage of water and food.

Both armies replenished :

Just then Piran received a message that Afrasiyab had sent powerful armies from different places to assist him. In these armies there were renowned warriors like Kamus from China and Kashan, Kundur from Saklab, Bivard from Kat, Garche from Sagsar, Shangal from Hindustan, Fartus from Chaganiye, Gahar from Gahaniye and Shamiran from Shokan.

Asking Homan to keep a watch over the Iranians, Piran went to meet this grand battalion. On the request of Kamus, the most celebrated warrior in the battalion, that day was kept for feasting and celebration, and they decided to launch an attack on the emaciated Iranian army the following day.

The Iranians were surprised in the morning, when there was no retaliation from the Turanian army after the night massacre. However, their surprise turned to terror when

they saw a huge army coming from the Turanian side. Their spirits rose once again when the crier announced that a huge army was also coming from the Iranian side, and in most probability it would reach them the next day.

By evening the Turanian contingent had reached the base of the mountain. As per their plan they rested that evening and prepared for an attack on the following day. As they were feasting, Piran got the news that an army was approaching from the Iranian side under Fariburz, and was relieved that Rustam was not part of the army.

Gudarz went to receive the Iranian army. After meeting Fariburz, he inquired about Rustam and was told that he would be joining them shortly. However, he had sent a message saying that they should not launch an offensive, but wait for the Turanians to initiate an attack. At the sight of the army, everyone in the Iranian camp, especially Toos, were suffused with a new life.

Early the next morning both the armies took positions. The gigantic Kamus challenged the Iranian camp to send a warrior to fight him. Gudarz accepted the challenge, but when he got exhausted, Toos came to his rescue. However, even the two together were no match for the huge Kushani warrior. To their good fortune, the day ended and the fight had to stop.

Arrival of Rustam :

That night Rustam arrived in the Iranian camp, and without resting from his long journey, immediately took stock of the situation. He was appraised of the Turanian army, the powerful warriors in it and the day's fight with Kamus. Rustam excused himself from the fight the next day as he wanted rest for himself and Raksh. He was amazed at the sheer size of the Turanian army, comprised from a dozen different provinces. Never before had he seen such a huge army. He prayed to God to help the Iranians.

There was panic in the Turanian camp over the news of Rustam's arrival. Piran and Homan were greatly worried, but Kamus told them not to worry. Piran handed over the charge of the Iranian army to the king of China.

Rustam takes on Ashkabus :

The following day, Ashkabus, another Kushani warrior challenged Iranians to fight him. Rohham rose up to the challenge and they fought for some time. However, Rohham got exhausted as neither his arrows nor his spear seemed to make any impact on the Kashani. Finally Ashkabus delivered a powerful blow with his mace, which stunned Rohham and he fled for his life.

Just as Toos was about to intercept Ashkabus, Rustam, who was on foot, intervened and asked Toos to leave. Ashkabus taunted Rustam who had come without a horse, armour or weapons, just with a bow and four arrows. In reply to his sarcasm, Rustam shot an arrow and fell the horse of Ashkabus. Before the Kushani warrior could gather his senses, Rustam shot another arrow, which struck the mighty Ashkabus and he fell to the ground with a resounding thud. Both the camps were agog at the sheer power of the shot. When

the Turanians examined the arrow, they were stunned at its size. It was even larger than their spears. They marveled at the strength of the person who could wield and shoot such an arrow.

The Turanians were surprised at the might of the warrior who killed Ashkabus. Though most of the Turanian army was convinced that it was Rustam, Piran disagreed. Kamus consoled Piran saying Rustam or not, he would fight the Iranians till his last breath.

The end of Kamus :

The next day, the two armies met once again in war. Kamus challenged the Iranians to send someone to fight him. After great hesitation, Alva a Zabuli warrior, went to fight Kamus, but he was decimated and trampled to death by Kamus within no time.

Rustam was pained at the death of one of his warriors. He set out into the battlefield with his lasso and mace and challenged Kamus. Such was the size of Kamus, that at first sight, Rustam too was taken aback. The gigantic Kushani swung a sword, which narrowly missed him, but partly ripped off Rakhsh's mane. Enraged, Rustam threw his lasso, which ensnared Kamus, pulled him off his horse and dragged him to the Iranian camp, where the Iranian warriors immediately put him to death.

The Turanian camp was utterly demoralised at the sudden death of their most powerful warrior. However, the Khakan pacified them and said that he will bring to book the slayer of Kamus. One of his warriors, Changesh, volunteered to avenge the death of the killer and went into the Iranian camp and challenged the killer of Kamus to come out. However, when Rustam emerged, he was terrified at his and his horse's size. He turned around to flee, but was too late. He had challenged the mighty Rustam and lost his life in bargain.

The Turanians were still not clear as to the identity of this mysterious killer. The Khakan, who himself was now very depressed, deputed Homan to go into the Iranian camp to find out the identity of this killer. Homan donned a disguise and went into the Iranian camp where he met Rustam. He asked his identity and requested him to do something to end the war.

Rustam introduced himself as an Iranian warrior, and said that the war could end if they hand over Karsivaz, Gorvizareh, Homan, Lahhak, Frashidvard, Kalbad and Nastihun, who were responsible for Siyavakhsh's death. Rustam further added that he would like to meet only Piran to negotiate about ending the war. Homan was terrified to know that he was among those who were sought by the Iranians. He immediately went back to his camp and delivered the message to Piran.

Piran goes to meet Rustam :

Piran eagerly went to meet the Iranian paladin, and when he introduced himself as Rustam, Piran immediately got off his horse as a mark of respect to him. After the niceties were over, Piran narrated his dilemma to Rustam.

“Believe me, O great warrior !” Piran said, “I am in a difficult predicament. Afrasiyab, the king of Turan has not forgiven me for saving the life of Kae Khushru, and the king of Iran has not forgiven me, as he holds me responsible for his father’s death. I am totally helpless, and am now just following the orders of the king. I have nothing against any of you, so please don’t hold anything against me or my family. In fact, I have helped the Iranians innumerable times. A war will take the lives of several innocents, so kindly call off the war.”

“I would readily do that, but on two conditions,” Rustam replied after some consideration. “One, that those responsible for Siyavakhsh’s death be handed over to King Kae Khushru, and the other that you too leave your king and come to Iran. I will see to it that you get double of what you have in Turan.”

Piran realised that it was next to impossible to fulfil these conditions, as most of those responsible for Siyavakhsh’s death were close relatives of Afrasiyab, and he would never give them over to Iran. So, asking for some time to consult the other warriors and his king, Piran went back to his camp.

When Piran consulted Khakan of China and Shangal of Hindustan, both of them opined that they should not be intimidated by the larger than life image of Rustam, but prepare for a war, since they had come there for that purpose. Though other Turanian warriors like Homan and Kalbad did not like the idea of war, they had to agree to the decision of their seniors.

Rustam too consulted senior Iranian warriors and informed them of his proposal to Piran. Gudarz cautioned Rustam by saying that they should not rely on Piran’s words, as on previous occasions he had agreed for a truce and then attacked with renewed vigour, once the Iranians became complacent. Rustam agreed to what Gudarz said, and they decided to bide their time and prepare for a fitting reply if Piran decided to attack. True enough, Piran came to tell Rustam that his conditions were unacceptable and war was inevitable

The war resumes :

Both the sides prepared their massive armies for the war. Shangal challenged Rustam to a duel, but he was flung to the ground in no time, and were it not for the intervention of other warriors, he would have surely lost his life. Another warrior, Saveh, challenged Rustam, but he too was flung to the ground and got trampled under Rakhsh’s powerful hooves. Still another warrior, without knowing Rustam, challenged the mighty paladin to a duel. He was, however flabbergasted at his size and decided to flee, but it was too late. He had to pay for his folly with his life. Rustam, thereafter instructed his warriors to capture the Khakan of China at all costs.

On the other hand, the Khakan of China sent his warriors to surround Rustam and capture him, but Rustam fought them off, with a little help from Gudarz and Rohham. Within no time Rustam was in full command and he captured, bound and sent several Turanian warriors like Fartuse and Ghorcheh to the Iranian camp.

Shangal returned and told Khakan, “Rustam is not a man, but a mountain. I see no man capable of fighting him. The only way he could be controlled is the intelligent use of the entire army, and that too seems to be highly improbable. What would the world say if our three hundred thousand strong army is not able to restrain Rustam.”

The Khakan was surprised to see the mighty Shangal so shattered by one encounter with Rustam. He realised that even his whole army was no match for Rustam and so he sent a messenger and requested truce. In return, he promised to pay huge annual taxes. Rustam declined the offer and said he would settle for no less than the crown and throne of the Khakan. When the messenger returned with this reply, Khakan was angered and he decided to continue the war.

Turanian army retreats :

Rustam was now determined to imprison Khakan. Within no time, he came close to the white elephant on which Khakan was riding, flung his dreaded lasso and pulled the mighty Khakan down to the ground. Immediately the Iranian soldiers pounced on him, bound him and Rustam himself dragged him to the Iranian camp. The Iranian warriors then wreaked havoc on the Turanian army and they had to retreat. The Iranian warriors tried to locate Piran amidst the chaos, but he was nowhere to be found.

Thus, after forty days, the Iranians stood victorious, but utterly exhausted. They celebrated this much-deserved victory. All of them profusely thanked Rustam, because they knew that without him they would have suffered an ignoble defeat at the hands of gigantic warriors like Kamus. Rustam too was satisfied, since he was successful in his mission without any major casualties. However, he was upset over the fact that most of the Turanian warriors had managed to escape.

He sent Fariborz to inform King Kae Khushru of this emphatic victory, and also sent a major part of the treasures recovered from the Turanian camp. So enormous were the treasures, that it took three thousand camels to carry them. Rustam also sent the war prisoners to the king along with a letter containing graphic description of the war and its enormity. However, he assured the king that he would not rest till the real culprits of Siyavakhsh's death were brought to book. Thereafter Rustam proceeded towards Turan in pursuit of Siyavakhsh's killers.

Afrasiyab was very disappointed when he came to know that the combined armies of Turan and its allies were defeated, with some warriors losing their life, some taken prisoners and others fleeing the battlefield. He was terrified when he was informed that the Iranian army under Rustam was fast approaching Turan. He conferred with his warriors to draw out a plan to defend Turan.

Fariburz reaches Iran :

King Kae Khushru was very happy to see Fariborz, and he became all the more happy when he got Rustam's message and reports about Iran's thumping victory. In his heart he thanked God for Rustam and prayed for his health and longevity. He imprisoned the Turanian warriors and made arrangements to have the treasure deposited in the treasury.

He sent a lot of gifts along with a message to Rustam, profusely thanking him. He further informed Rustam of his decision not to punish by death the prisoners of war, and also requested him to do likewise. He however exhorted him to keep up the fight till Afrasiyab himself was taken captive. The king also sent gifts for his other faithful warriors. Fariburz returned with the message and gifts.

Rustam proceeds to Turan :

As per his king's instructions, Rustam proceeded to Turan through Sughdha (Samarkand) and then to Bidad, where its cannibal king Kafur intercepted him. Rustam sent three thousand warriors under Gastaham, Bizan and Hazir to fight against the king of Bidad, but this small army was heavily outnumbered and so Bizan was sent by Gastaham to ask Rustam for help.

Rustam responded by himself going to their rescue. He single handedly fought the entire army. First he killed Kafur and then made his way towards the fort razing down all that came in his way. However his march came to a halt when he approached the fort, which was built by Tur with black magic, and supposed to be impregnable. The fort had rations and ammunitions to last for a long time, and there were secret tunnels to fetch more if at all the need arose.

Rustam thought of an ingenious plan to capture this fort. He had the walls of the fort dug up from underneath, poured oil so as to reach the other side of the wall and set it on fire. Thus, the entire fort caught fire and most of its inhabitants were killed. The Iranian army rested and feasted there for three days, and then, on the fourth day resumed their march towards Turan.

Afrasiyab prepares a defense :

When Afrasiyab came to know that Rustam was approaching Turan with an army, he sent Fargar, a trusted warrior, to determine the strength of his army. Afrasiyab himself started preparations for fighting Rustam, but knowing the mighty Iranian paladin, he made provisions for any misfortune that may happen. He called his son Shideh and instructed him, that just in case he failed against Rustam, he would flee Turan and go on the other side of the Sea of China. So, for his use, he was depositing his treasures and other valuables near the banks of the river Almas.

Fargar arrived after surveying the Iranian army and gave his king the relevant information. Afrasiyab summoned Piran and instructed him to prepare an army to counter Rustam's attack.

Afrasiyab calls Puladvand :

Afrasiyab was terrified of Rustam and so he started making preparations for his safety. He wrote a letter to Puladvand, a petty but powerful chieftain who resided on the mountains of China, to come and help him fight against Rustam. The chieftain immediately obeyed his king's message and came to Turan, where the two devised a strategy to fight Rustam.

The following day Puladvand created havoc in the Iranian army. He flung Toos to the ground. When Giv rushed to his rescue, he too was caught in a lasso and dragged down. Bizan and Rohham then went to help Giv, but they too were thrown on the ground. The Iranian warriors panicked at this powerful warrior. Fariburz and Gudarz summoned Rustam, because they knew that he alone could control a warrior like Puladvand.

Rustam immediately rushed to the rescue of the Iranian warriors. On seeing the gargantuan size of Puladvand he prayed to God for extra strength. He flung his lasso at him, but the crafty warrior continued to dodge it. Then Rustam struck him with powerful blows of his mace, but that too seemed to be ineffective on the huge Puladvand, who retaliated by striking Rustam with his sword. However, the sword rebounded from his armour and helmet without causing any harm. Thus the efforts of both the warriors were going in vain and hence they were frustrated.

Puladvand then suggested that they wrestle without arms, and Rustam agreed. They instructed their fellow warriors not to interfere in their duel. Both the man-mountains fought for a long time, trying to get an upper hand over the other. Finally, Rustam managed to lift Puladvand off the ground and flung him afar breaking all the bones in his body. However, the injured Puladvand managed to flee with the help of Turanian warriors. The Iranian camp greeted Rustam's victory with a triumphant roar.

Iranian army wins again :

On Piran's advise, Afrasiyab fled the camp, which resulted in chaos among the ranks and file of the Turanian army. They started running helter and skelter. Out of fear of being massacred by the Iranians they sought forgiveness from Rustam who ordered the war to be stopped. The Iranian army triumphantly marched back to Iran.

King Kae Khushru himself came to receive Rustam and his army. He bestowed great honour on Rustam, and offered him a seat next to himself. Other warriors were also offered honourable seats. The king ordered a celebration for felicitating his warriors and talked to them about the war. Gudarz and other warriors narrated Rustam's exploits at length, which greatly regaled the king. Rustam then expressed a desire to visit his hometown Zabulistan to which the king readily agreed. He gave Rustam a lot of treasure and himself went to see him off.

Rustam fights Akvan dev :

Rustam proved himself to be indispensable to King Kae Khushru. When Akvan, a notorious demon terrorised the shepherds, the king could not find anyone to put an end to the harassment of the powerful demon. Finally, he summoned Rustam, and the great paladin used his brains and brawn to put an end to the menace of this mighty demon.

The Episode Of Bizan

The menace of wild boars :

Once when King Kae Khushru was feasting and talking with his warriors, a few farmers from Armani, a province on the border of Iran and Turan, came and complained to the king that a herd of wild boars regularly came and destroyed their fields. The king felt sympathised with them and offered a tray full of jewels, ten horses and rolls of silken cloth to anyone who would volunteer to go and help these farmers.

There was a long silence among the warriors as none was willing to take on the menace of thousands of wild boars. Finally young Bizan volunteered to go for this task. His father Giv cautioned him saying he was too raw for this difficult task. This infuriated the fiery Bizan who told his father not to underestimate him because of his youth.

The king was happy at the confidence of this young warrior and assigned him this difficult task. He appointed Gurgin, a senior warrior, as his guide. The two prepared for the long and arduous journey. Apart from taking other soldiers, they also took several hunter hounds and hawks.

Bizan sets off for Armani :

Well-equipped for their momentous hunt, Bizan and Gurgin set off for Armani. They crossed several forests and finally reached their destination. Bizan set up a plan to ensnare the boars, but when he asked Gurgin to help him, the envious Gurgin flatly refused saying he was only sent to show him the way and not to help him. Young Bizan was flabbergasted at this terse reply. Seeing the enmity and hatred in Gurgin's eyes, he soon realised that he could not expect any help from him.

Bizan single-handedly fought and killed all boars one after another. Some were as huge as elephants. Gurgin did not come to help him in the hunt, not even when Bizan's life was in danger. Bizan finished off all boars and cut off their huge teeth as a souvenir of his triumph.

Gurgin plays foul :

Gurgin did not expect Bizan to come out alive from this dangerous hunt. But when the young paladin emerged triumphant, Gurgin feared that his non-co-operation would be reported to the king, and so he devised a devious plan to do away with Bizan.

"Some distance from here is a place as beautiful as paradise," said Gurgin to Bizan. "A warrior like you should go and relax there for a while. Now is the right time to go, because the place may have blossomed in spring and the scenic beauty would be heavenly.

"There is another reason why you should go there," added Gurgin. "Manizeh, the gorgeous daughter of Afrasiyab comes to this place with her beautiful maids at this time of the year. It's the right time for you to go and enjoy yourself. It would be an added bonus if you could take some of these maids back to Iran."

The youthful Bizan got enticed by this tempting offer. Instructing Gurgin to follow him, Bizan put on his best clothes and set off for the place, least realising that he was walking straight into a trap laid by Gurgin.

Bizan meets Manizeh :

On reaching the place indicated by Gurgin, Bizan saw a camp and was assured that Manizeh was already there with her maids. He took position behind a clump of trees and tried to catch a glimpse of Manizeh. Incidentally, at the same time Manizeh came out of her tent and her eyes fell on Bizan. As their eyes met, there was instant attraction between the two. After getting to know each other through messages passed on through the maids, Manizeh invited Bizan into her tent.

The young couple at first exchanged pleasantries inside the tent. Gradually the fire of passion ignited on both sides and the two were engulfed in it. There was rejoicing and celebrations for three nights and days. In the course of their conversation, Manizeh came to know that Bizan was an Iranian warrior and she realised that he would never agree to come to Turan. Manizeh, however, wanted to take Bizan with her to Turan for she was headlong in love with the handsome Iranian hunk. She mixed drugs in Bizan's drinks and when the unsuspecting Bizan lost consciousness, Manizeh had him carried away into her palace in Turan.

Bizan is carried away to Turan :

When Bizan came to his senses, he was surprised to find himself in an alien place, sleeping next to the beautiful Manizeh. Gradually the full picture dawned on him and he was terrified at the thought of being in the palace of an enemy king. Manizeh pacified him saying that his stay would be a total secret and she would not let anyone know about him. As days passed by, Bizan started enjoying his stay in Turan. Not only was he constantly accompanied by his heart-throb Manizeh, but he was also surrounded by countless other beautiful maids attending on him – some playing musical instruments, some serenading and some feeding him.

However, as all good things come to an end, and secrets do not remain secrets for long, a watchman of the palace smelt the presence of a male stranger in the princess' palace and reported it to the king, who immediately consulted his son Kara Khan. He advised his father to ensure the identity of the stranger, and Afrasiyab sent his brother Karsivaz to investigate.

Karsivaz forced his way into Manizeh's room and caught Bizan unawares. Bizan was relaxing and had no weapons with him except for a small dagger, which he always kept hidden in his socks. With this small weapon he challenged Karsivaz, who assured him that he would be taken to the king without being harmed.

Bizan was then taken to the king, where he pleaded his innocence, but the king was adamant on punishing him. He issued an order to hang him in the open.

Luckily for Bizan, Piran happened to see the gallows being prepared in the open. On inquiring, he was told that it was for Bizan, an Iranian warrior who had somehow displeased the king. Immediately Piran went to Bizan and asked him how he landed in this predicament. Bizan explained to him at length all that had happened.

Piran instantly ordered the hanging to be halted and rushed to the king. He reminded the king of the dire consequences Turan had to face by killing Siyavakhsh and requested him not to take the life of another young Iranian warrior. He cautioned the king that he would have to once again face the wrath of the Iranians, especially Rostam, as Bizan happened to be his grandson. Piran requested the king to have Bizan imprisoned in a desolate place instead of having him hanged.

Bizan is imprisoned :

Piran's warnings and entreaties had an effect on Afrasiyab, and he agreed to have Bizan imprisoned in a deep dungeon. Bizan was heavily secured in chains from head to foot, and put in the dungeon with a heavy stone closing its entrance. On the king's orders, Manizheh too was dragged to the dungeon as a punishment for loving an Iranian. She was not allowed to take any belongings with her except a bedsheet.

Manizheh was distraught and shocked at the happenings and spent her first day crying near the dungeon. Then she realised that she should keep herself and Bizan alive and so went begging for food the next day. She shared with Bizan whatever meager morsels she managed to gather, by digging a hole in the dungeon and passing the food through it.

Gurgin returns to Iran :

When Bizan did not return to Armani after seven days, Gurgin assumed that he might have been caught by Afrasiyab's men and put to death. There was a pang of guilt in his heart for doing such a dastardly work, and he went to look for Bizan. After some time he found Bizan's horse in a very pitiable condition. Assuming that tragedy may have befallen him, he returned to Iran with Bizan's horse.

When the Iranian people saw Gurgin returning alone with Bizan's horse, word of the misfortune spread like wild fire and soon reached Giv. The experienced Giv soon realised that something was amiss and rushed to meet Gurgin to inquire about his son.

"Where is my son ? Why have you returned alone ?" the concerned father asked Gurgin. The wily Gurgin quickly cooked up a story and said in a pensive tone, "Great misfortune has befallen us, O mighty Giv. The boar hunt was very successful, but whilst returning a huge jackass attacked us. Your brave son threw a lasso at the gigantic animal, but the animal dragged the lasso and swiftly disappeared in the forest taking Bizan and his horse along with him. I searched in the forest for a long time but was only able to retrieve the horse. I suspect that the jackass was none but Div-e-Sapid in disguise."

Giv suspected Gurgin of foul play and was not ready to accept this story. His anger knew no bounds, and only his age and maturity restrained him from killing Gurgin there and

then. However, he warned Gurgin that if at all he was found guilty of lying, his life would not be spared.

Giv then went to King Kae Khushru and complained that he suspected foul play from the tone and manner in which Gurgin narrated the happenings. The king immediately summoned Gurgin and cross-examined him. He too smelt something fishy and ordered Gurgin to be relegated to a dungeon. The king then consulted priests and seers who assured him that Bizan was alive. With this news the king consoled Giv and sent his soldiers to look for Bizan.

Bizan's whereabouts are ascertained:

On New Year day, Giv requested King Kae Khushru to consult his 'Jam-i-geti numay' "the goblet, which shows the world". In essence, this goblet seems to be a gadget through which the past and the future could be gleaned astrologically on the day of Vernal Equinox. The king obliged Giv and after doing his prayers took the goblet, searched all the continents and finally located a pale and starving Bizan in a place called Kargsar in Turan. He was chained in a dungeon and was being looked after by a lady with a noble face.

The king smiled and said, "Don't worry dear Giv, though your son is not in the best of health, he is alive. He is imprisoned in a dungeon in such a remote place that none but Rustam would be able to free him from there. Don't waste any time now. Immediately go to Nimruz and request Rustam to go to Kargsar and secure the release of his grandson."

The king wrote a letter to Rustam in which he lauded the services of the great paladin and then briefed him about the entire episode of Bizan. He also lauded the services of the family of Gudarz and Giv and finally requested Rustam to go and rescue their only descendant at all costs and at the earliest.

Without wasting any time, Giv took the letter and set off to Sistan via the Hirmand river with a few of his trusted soldiers. There he met Rustam, gave him the letter and conveyed the king's message. Rustam immediately agreed to help Giv and promised to free Bizan. After three days of rest and preparations the two set off towards Iran.

When the king was informed of Rustam's arrival, he himself went to receive him. He conferred on him great honours and then, as per the custom, spent some time in thanking God for his mercies, exchanging news and feasting.

Gurgin's bluff was now uncovered. He was feeling very repentant for his misdeed and subsequent lies. When he came to know that Rustam had agreed to search for Bizan, he too felt relieved. He sent a message to Rustam requesting him to ask the king to forgive him and showed readiness to help in his search for Bizan. Though Rustam was furious at Gurgin, he felt pity for the old warrior. He sent him a message that he will request the king to free him only if Bizan was found alive.

The next day Rustam spoke on behalf of Gurgin to the king, reminded him of his services to Iran and requested the king to forgive him. The king agreed with great reluctance. Rustam then relayed his plan to the king. He said that he would be going into the enemy territory as a trader, and so he would need gold coins, camels, silk cloth, a thousand soldiers and seven warriors – Gurgin, Jang-e-Shavran, Gastaham, Gorazeh, Rohham, Farhad and Ashkash.

Rustam to the rescue :

The king readily gave Rustam all that he asked for. After due preparations, Rustam set off for Turan early the next morning. When they reached the border between Iran and Turan, Rustam instructed the soldiers to wait there and move only if they heard of his death. Then he asked the seven warriors to don the garb of traders, take the jewels and silk cloth on camels and accompany him to Turan.

On reaching Turan, Rustam went to Piran and introduced himself as a trader from Iran. He presented Piran with a goblet full of jewels and sought permission to trade in Turan. Piran was highly impressed by the trader. Not only did he give him permission to trade, he also offered him a place to stay in his palace, to which Rustam politely refused. He selected a house and decided to stay there with other warriors and trade from there. As word spread that traders from Iran trading in Chinese silk and jewels had come, people from far and near started coming to them in large numbers.

Manizeh meets Rustam :

When Manizeh came to know that a group of traders had come from Iran, she immediately went to meet them. She inquired for the leader of the group and rushed to talk to him. As per the custom, she first showered praises on him and his country and then started asking questions, “Tell me, O noble trader! Are the people in Iran aware of the imprisonment of their young hero Bizan and his sad plight? Do they know that a Turanian princess is looking after him? Is his grandfather Rustam aware of it ? Has he decided to do anything about it?”

Rustam immediately recognised her as Manizeh and his heart was full with sympathy for her. However, before the other Turanians he did not want to give away his identity and so feigning indifference he thundered in mock anger, “Whoever you are, please go away. I am just a trader and know neither the king of Iran, nor Bizan nor Rustam. Don’t waste my time at this busy hour of trading with your useless talks.”

Manizeh, who was already distressed was very much hurt by the insensitive manner in which she was treated. After all she was of royal blood, so she angrily retorted, “O worthy leader! You may not help me if you choose not to, but don’t treat an unfortunate woman in this manner. I wonder whether everybody treats poor people in Iran like this?”

Rustam realised that he over reacted in order to protect his identity. In a milder tone he replied, “Lady, I am sorry that I got angry at you. I was engrossed in my work and hence I reacted a bit rudely. I sympathise with you, but I am afraid I can not help you in any way. Nevertheless, tell me who you are and what troubles you.”

Manizeh returns disappointed :

Manizeh introduced herself as daughter of Afrasiyab and narrated her tragic story with the request that the same be conveyed to King Kae Khushru and his warrior Giv in Iran. Rustam expressed his inability to help her in any way. He however gave her a lot of food. In one roasted chicken, he stealthily slipped his monogrammed finger ring and asked Manizeh to give it to Bizan.

Manizeh returned to the dungeon, narrated the day's events to Bizan and dutifully gave him the roasted chicken. Bizan was voraciously devouring the chicken when he got hold of the finger ring on which was written 'RUSTAM' in minute handwriting. Bizan was ecstatic at the sight of the ring of his grand-father and started roaring with laughter. Manizeh inquired the reason for this outburst and on condition of strict confidentiality Bizan disclosed that the trader was none other than the great Rustam himself. He then told her to go back to him and confirm his identity.

Steeped in happiness, Manizeh was now certain that her days of agony would soon be over. She went back to the trader and confidentially asked him his true identity. Rustam affirmed that Bizan was right and told Manizeh that he will come late at night to rescue Bizan. He asked her to collect wood during the day and make a huge bonfire so that he could easily locate his way to the dungeon.

Manizeh returned to the dungeon and gave the happy tidings to Bizan, who was overjoyed at this unexpected good fortune. Manizeh spent the rest of the day in collecting wood and then awaited darkness. As night set in, she lit a huge bonfire and soon enough heard the welcome sound of approaching horse's hooves.

Rustam rescues Bizan :

Very shortly, led by the bonfire, Rustam came along with other warriors. He saw the huge stone at the mouth of the dungeon and asked his seven warriors to shift it. The stone was so huge that even the seven warriors with their combined strength were not able to budge it. Finally Rustam himself stepped down and with one heave of his hand lifted the stone and threw it afar into China with the earth reverberating under its weight.

Before bringing out Bizan from the dungeon, he extracted a reluctant promise from him. Rustam then threw his lasso into the dungeon and asked Bizan to climb up. Rustam was surprised at the sight that met his eyes. Bizan had reduced to less than half his normal self due to starvation. He was all bedraggled with overgrown hair and nails. The chains had badly cut him and there were blood marks all over his body. Rustam broke the chains and freed him. Then he asked him to bathe and get dressed.

Rustam then asked Ashkash to gather all their belongings and take them along with Bizan and Manizeh to Iran. Rustam and the other warriors decided to avenge Bizan's humiliation by fighting against Afrasiyab and only then come back to Iran. Bizan too expressed the desire to participate in avenging his humiliation and so Ashkash alone proceeded to Iran along with their belongings.

A happy ending to the story :

At night Rustam alerted the Iranian soldiers at the border and then along with Bizan and the warriors attacked Afrasiyab's palace, but the Turanian king managed to escape in the darkness. They then set off towards Iran. In the morning when the whole picture dawned on Afrasiyab, he mobilised his soldiers and sent them to capture Bizan, Rustam and other warriors. The Turanian soldiers caught up with the Iranian warriors and a fight ensued in which the Iranians fought bravely and the Turanians had to retreat.

Rustam triumphantly returned to Iran with Bizan and Manizeh by his side. Giv and Gudarz were overjoyed at having Bizan back with them. The king and other warriors went on foot to welcome them. Amidst celebrations, music and festivity the king met Bizan and heard his entire story. Then the king conferred a lot of gifts and jewels to Bizan and Manizeh. The next day Rustam too returned to his hometown after being bestowed with gifts of jewels, horses and jewel-studded horses by the king.

Wars Erupt Again

Afrasiyab prepares for war :

Afrasiyab, smarting at the thought of once again being disgraced by Rustam prepared an army to attack Iran. He requested his allies, the Fagfur of China and the King of Khotan to send him armies, which arrived within two weeks. He selected fifty thousand able soldiers, and under the command of his son Shideh stationed them at the city of Kharzam. Another fifty thousand soldiers were given to Piran and he was assigned the mission to go to Iran and destroy King Kae Khushru.

Kae Khushru plans a defense :

King Kae Khushru got the news that a strong Turanian army was approaching river Jaihun and will soon be in Iran. After consulting senior warriors he requested his allies Rome and Hindustan for armies and also requested all able bodied Iranians to join the Iranian army within forty days. Within two weeks the king had his required army. He gave weapons and armours to his soldiers and they were now ready to take on the Turanians.

The king prepared three smaller armies of thirty thousand soldiers each. Rustam was appointed commander of one of the armies and was asked to go to Hindustan via Sistan and Kashmir, and station himself there. Another army under the command of Lohrasp was to go to Alan and Garcheh in Turan. A third army under Ashkash was to go to Kharzam to fight against Shideh.

The main army was assigned to Gudarz. He was given other warriors like Gurgin, Zangeh, Gastaham, Shidush, Farhad, Kharrad, Giv, Gorazeh and Rohham to assist him. Before the army left for Turan, the king admonished Gudarz not to harm anyone who did not come in his way, nor to command the army in anger, to treat Piran with respect, and be just to all and pray to God.

When Gudarz's army reached the forest of Raibad, he sent Giv to Piran with three conditions for surrender or face the prospects of an Iranian attack. To hand over to the king of Iran all those who were responsible for the death of Siyavakhsh, to return the treasures to all those from whom they were plundered, and to surrender his son and two brothers as guarantee for the fulfillment of the two former conditions. If he was willing to fulfil these conditions, he should go to the city of Chach in Khotan, or else be prepared for a war.

Giv went to Visehgard via Balkh to try and convince Piran to accept the conditions, but Piran was too attached to Afrasiyab to accept the conditions and strand him. Instead, he informed Afrasiyab about the impending attack of the Iranians and thirty thousand soldiers were sent to help Piran fight the Iranian attack.

Piran told Giv that the conditions laid down by Gudarz were too unreasonable for any right thinking man to accept. He further added that he had orders from his king to launch an attack so they better be prepared for a war. Giv returned back and conveyed the message to Gudarz.

Confrontation between the two armies:

Piran crossed the Jaihun river and brought his army to Kanabad. Gudarz came out with his army from the forest of Raibad. Both the commanders strategically arranged their armies, grouped them and assigned commands to different warriors. However neither army launched the attack for three days, as each expected the other to launch the offensive.

Bizan became wearied with this stalemate, as he had to needlessly bear the burden of his heavy armour and helmet in the scorching sun. He went to his father and reprimanded him for not initiating the attack. Giv explained to him that because of the placement of the armies, the one who attacked first would be in a precarious position. However, Bizan decided that he could no longer keep on his full battle regalia and told his father that he would remove his armour and helmet and don it only when required.

The Turanian camp too witnessed a similar scene, where young Homan went to Piran, his elder brother and commander of the army, and asked him to commence the war. Piran explained to him that the Iranians were ensconced in such a safe position that it would not be wise to attack them unless they came out of it.

Homan attacks the Iranians :

Homan did not accept Piran's explanation and decided to attack the next day. He went into the Iranian camp and started challenging the lesser warriors at first, and then senior ones like Rohham and Fariburz to come out and fight him. The warriors did not give in to his instigations and told him that they would not fight without the order of their commander Gudarz.

Homan then went to Gudarz and challenged him. Gudarz discerned that if he accepted the challenge and Homan was killed, the Turanians would be demoralised and flee. He did

not want this to happen, so he asked Homan to go away. The vain Turanian however thought that Gudarz was afraid of him and so he went on a rampage killing four guards, and then proclaiming himself as the invincible victor.

Bizan takes on Homan :

When Bizan came to know about Homan's pride and insult of his grandfather, he decided to teach him a lesson. He was not aware as to why Gudarz had declined to fight Homan, and so, he went to his father and complained that his grandfather had become meek and cautious because of the death of several of his sons in the battlefield. Giv told Bizan not to do judge his grandfather without knowing his point of view, and so Bizan went to Gudarz and reprimanded him for not starting the war even on the sixth day and allowing a Turanian to wreak rampage in the Iranian camp. Bizan insisted on fighting Homan and finally Gudarz relented and gave him the permission.

Homan is killed :

When Giv came to know that Gudarz had given in to his grandson, he went to convince his son not to fight Homan, but Bizan was adamant on going. Finally Giv too relented. He gave his son Siyavakhsh's armour and horse, and with these to help him, Bizan challenged Homan to a duel.

The two decided to fight in a desolate place. They first fought with bows and arrows and then with spear, sword and mace but none could get the better of the other. Then they tried to dislodge each other from the horses but both the exhausted warriors still proved equal to one another in strength. Finally they decided to fight a duel with bare hands. Though Homan was stronger of the two, Bizan had better techniques, which helped him in the end, and he was able to fling Homan to the ground and bring an end to his life.

When Piran came to know about his brother Homan's death, he decided to avenge it by perpetrating 'Shab-e-khun', that is, "massacre at night", and informed his brother Nastihan accordingly. Nastihan stealthily went to attack the Iranian camp at night with ten thousand soldiers, but Iranian soldiers on watch duty spotted them from a distance and instantly sounded off Gudarz about the impending attack. Gudarz prepared Bizan to meet the Turanians headlong. The two armies fought a battle in which the Turanians were miserably defeated, and Nastihan lost his life.

Requests for reinforcements :

Piran was shattered at the news of his army's defeat. The greater shock was that of the death of his second brother within one day. He sent a message to Afrasiyab asking for help. When Gudarz came to know that the Turanian army was defeated, the wise commander at once calculated that Piran will send for help, and so he too wrote a letter to his king to send help. He further implored his king that if Afrasiyab came to participate in the war, he too should personally come to the battlefield to boost the morale of his soldiers. Gudarz then urgently dispatched the letter with his son Hazir, who handed over the letter to his king within seven days.

King Kae Khushru was very happy with the developments at the battlefield. He organised a feast in honour of Hazir, who had brought the good tidings, and rewarded him with rich gifts. The king then ordered his scribe to write a letter to Gudarz.

The king started the letter by congratulating Gudarz and then instructed him to deal firmly with Piran. He told him not to worry about Afrasiyab participating in the war, because the Turanian king was surrounded on all sides by Rostam, Lohrassp and Ashkash and he would not dare to come out of his fortress. He said that he was sending Toos to conquer Dahestan, Gurgan and the neighbouring lands and would himself come to him after some time. He ended the letter by advising Gudarz to be prepared to attack as well as defend and not offer truce to Piran.

The letter was sealed and dispatched with Hazir. The king told Toos to prepare for an attack and himself started preparations for going after him. In the meanwhile, Hazir reached the Iranian camp and gave the king's letter to Gudarz, who, as per the instructions, started preparing for an attack on Piran.

Piran asks for truce :

Piran came to know through his spies that Gudarz was preparing for an attack. He wrote a letter to Gudarz in which he promised to give many provinces in exchange of a truce. He specified that he was asking for the truce not because of weakness or fright, but because he desired peace for the two countries. He further added that if at all Gudarz desired war, it should be in the form of duels between warriors and not amongst soldiers. He sealed the letter and dispatched it with his son Ruintan.

Gudarz received Ruintan with great dignity and ordered a seven days feast in his honour. Then he replied to Piran saying that he suspected his intentions in asking for a truce as just a few days back he had rejected his offer for peace. He told Piran to take some time if he wanted, but a war was imminent. The letter was then dispatched with Ruintan.

On receiving the letter, Piran started preparations for the war. He wrote a letter to his king saying that he was informed by his sources that King Kae Khushru was to join Gudarz for the war, and so it would be in the fitness of things if he too came with an army.

Afrasiyab replied that his information was wrong and Kae Khushru was not coming for the war, hence there was no need for him to come. Nevertheless, he was sending an additional army of thirty thousand soldiers. Piran was disheartened on receiving this letter. He informed his warriors and soldiers about the king's decision and started preparing for the war, seeds of which were sown by the killing of Siyavakhsh.

Fresh preparations for war :

Piran appointed Lahhak and Frashivard as commanders of different wings of the Turanian army. Gudarz appointed Hazir and Giv, and under them Gorazeh, Gastaham and Bizan in charge of the Iranian army. The war started in great earnest. Piran and Giv came face to face and started showering arrows on each other, but when Piran saw other Iranian warriors approaching, he retreated. Meanwhile Lahhak and Farshivard were sent

to fight the Iranians, but they too fled because of the offensive launched by Giv, Gorazeh, Bizan and Hazir.

‘Battle of Yazdarokh (eleven)’ :

Gudarz and Piran met to discuss the strategy of war. They decided to select ten warriors from each side, they themselves being the eleventh. These eleven will then fight against each other.

The two commanders then went to their camps, Gudarz at Raibad and Piran at Kanabad. And selected ten of the best and seniormost warriors. This battle is well known in history as the ‘Battle of Yazdarokh’, that is, ‘Battle of Eleven’. By the time day broke, both sides were ready with their warriors who were paired against each other as follows :

Iranian	Turanian
Gudarz (Commander)	Piran (Commander)
Giv	Gorvizareh
Fariborz	Kalbad
Rohham	Barman
Gorazeh	Siyamak
Gurgin	Andariman
Bizan	Ruin
Jang-e-Shavran	Akhvast
Bartah	Kohram
Foruhal	Zangalah
Hazir	Sepahram

Both the commanders gathered their warriors on a hillock and each was given the instruction to descend the hillock, fight the adversary and come back to hoist their flag if the adversary was defeated. Then the warriors of both the camps descended and engaged themselves in duels with their pre-determined partners.

Turanian warriors defeated :

The duels proved to be very costly and disastrous for the Turanians as nine of their ten warriors lost their lives, and one, Gorvizareh, was rendered unconscious and taken captive. Fariborz was the first to register victory and hoist his flag, the other warriors followed him one after another. Within a period of nine hours, the Turanian warriors were reduced to smithereens, without any considerable damage to the Iranians.

End of Piran :

Piran was utterly devastated, as he had lost the best of his warriors. He met Gudarz for the final duel. The two commanders started off with bows and arrows. After some time one of Gudarz’s arrow pierced a leg of Piran’s horse. The horse fell on the ground crushing Piran’s leg. Piran, who was in great pain realised that his end was near and started fleeing.

On seeing Piran running away, Gudarz pursued him on foot shouting “O mighty Turanian commander! Where is your might and where is your strength ?” Seeing Gudarz following him, Piran shot an arrow from the top which pierced Gudarz’s arm. Angered, Gudarz retaliated by flinging his dagger at Piran, which pierced his heart. Piran dropped on the ground writhing in pain, and shortly thereafter breathed his last all alone in the wilderness.

The ten victorious Iranian warriors who had gathered on the hillock, noticed Gudarz’s absence, and were concerned about him, but their worries soon disappeared when they saw him triumphantly riding towards them. After the warriors celebrated their victory, Gudarz asked Rohham to bring back the body of Piran with due dignity.

The Iranian warriors took the nine dead Turanian warriors and the captured Gorvizareh to their camp. The triumphant Iranian warriors were given a heroic welcome by the rest of the army and the camp leader Gastaham. Just then, there was another cause for jubilation when they received a message that King Kae Khushru was coming to them with an army, and would reach them the following day.

Turanian camp in grief :

The Turanian camp was devastated at the death of their commander and some of their best warriors. The entire army was demoralised and had lost faith in their king’s ability to protect them. When Piran’s brothers Lahhak and Frashivard learnt about the death of their valiant brother and his brave warriors, they remembered his advice and decided to flee through the forest route. On their way, the undercover soldiers of the Iranian army intercepted them. In the fight that ensued, eight Turanian soldiers were killed. However, Lahhak and Frashivard managed to escape.

Bizan goes to help Gastaham :

When Gudarz came to know that Lahhak and Frashivard had escaped, he asked someone to volunteer to go and capture them. Gastaham, who had held the fort at the Iranian camp during the ‘Battle of Eleven’ offered to undertake the mission, and left immediately.

Bizan felt that Gastaham alone will not be able to tackle both Lahhak and Frashivard, and reproached Gudarz for sending him alone. Gudarz realised his mistake, heeded his grandson’s advice and asked his warriors as to who would volunteer to go and help Gastaham. All senior warriors, fresh from the ‘Battle of Eleven’, were tired and unwilling to go, so Bizan himself decided to leave urgently as he was concerned about Gastaham’s safety.

When Giv came to know that his son had set off to help Gastaham, he got worried. He followed and caught up with him, and tried to persuade him not to risk his life. “Son, please don’t go on this risky mission. Think about your father and his old age. You are my only son and I do not want to lose you.”

“But father, you know I owe a debt of gratitude to Gastaham for saving my life at the battle of Ladan,” Bizan tried to reason with his father. “Then let me come with you too,” the anxious father tried to strike a compromise.

The idea did not appeal to Bizan and he thundered, “Three Iranian warriors to capture two Turanians ! Just imagine how much we would be ridiculed when the world will come to know this.”

“Let me then go instead of you,” pleaded Giv. “That is worse,” Bizan argued emphatically. “If I allow you to go instead of myself, the world will scoff at me for sending my father to fight while I sat at home. Father, don’t worry about me. Give me your blessings and allow me to go.” Finally Giv had to relent. He wished him well and bade him farewell with a heavy heart.

End of Lahhak and Frashivard :

Lahhak and Frashivard had managed to cover a long distance and considered themselves safe. As night approached, they alighted near a stream, quenched their thirst, had their feed and lay down to sleep. Late in the night Gastaham, who was slightly behind them, came near the place where they were resting. Their horses sensed a presence and started neighing. Frashivard woke up with a start and perceived impending danger. He woke his brother up and both ran towards open ground.

After some time, Frashivard realised that it was not a troop or an army as he had guessed but a lone warrior. He soon recognised him as Gastaham and decided to fight him. He along with his brother attacked Gastaham as he approached, but the alert Gastaham anticipated the attack and with a single powerful stroke of his sword killed Frashivard. Then Lahhak and Gastaham fought for a long time and Lahhak finally succumbed to Gastaham’s might.

Bleeding and exhausted Gastaham went towards the stream and spent the night in great pain praying to God to send someone to his rescue. The next day, Bizan came into the forest looking for Gastaham. On seeing his horse, he followed its track and came to the stream where Gastaham was lying in a pool of blood, with faint traces of life. Bizan tried to revive Gastaham, and his attempts were successful. Gastaham gained consciousness after some time.

On seeing Bizan, Gastaham’s face lit up and with great difficulty he exclaimed, “Dear Bizan, I knew that God would send somebody, and I am very happy that it is you.” Grimacing with pain, he continued, “I know I will not live long, but do me a favour and fulfil my last wish. Reach me to the king, as I want to see his benevolent face before I die. Also take my victims along, so that I can show them with pride to my king and say that I have done my duty and fulfilled my promise.”

Bizan enlisted the help of a Turk captive, and put the bodies of Lahhak and Frashivard on two horses. Then he gently helped the wounded Gastaham on to his horse and set off towards the Iranian camp, as King Kae Khushru would have been there by now.

Iranian king reaches the camp :

The entire Iranian camp was filled with joy and celebration, when King Kae Khushru reached there. After resting for some time, he heard with great pride and interest the exploits of his brave warriors. The king then bestowed gifts and jewels to his warriors, and to his valiant commander Gudarz he gifted the province of Esfahan.

The king was pained to learn about the death of Piran. He ordered a Dakhma to be built in his memory and made preparations for giving him a dignified funeral. However, he ordered that the captive Gorbizareh be executed, as he was one of the persons responsible for Siyavakhsh's death. The leader of the imprisoned Turanian soldiers asked for the king's forgiveness and reprieve, and the king not only forgave them generously, but also gave them a choice either to stay in Iran or return to Turan. The Turanian soldiers, who were forced to go into the war, unanimously agreed to stay back in Iran and serve King Kae Khushru.

The king saves Gastaham's life :

As this was going on, the watch-soldiers announced that a warrior was advancing with three corpses on horseback. Eager to know his identity, some warriors rushed to see and were very happy when they recognised him as Bizan.

Bizan was very warmly received. Without wasting any time he asked audience of the king and requested him to immediately see Gastaham as time was running out for him.. King Kae Khushru rushed to see his faithful warrior. As their eyes met, tears started trickling down eyes of all present. Never before had they seen such dedication and love for the ruler by the ruled.

King Kae Khushru instantly brought out a rare medicine which he always carried with him and which had come down to him from king Hoshang. He summoned the best Indian, Chinese and Roman medicine men, who always accompanied his retinue, entrusted Gastaham to their care and asked them to wisely use the medicine on his wounds.

With expert care and God's grace, Gastaham recovered within two weeks and everybody exclaimed that if ever a dead man could come alive, it was Gastaham. Everybody praised Bizan for his bold and loving gesture of going after Gastaham which saved his life.

Another attack on Turan :

After the 'War of Eleven', King Kae Khushru decided to launch a fresh attack on the Turanians. He summoned his soldiers and paladins for the war and also ordered all rulers under his sovereignty to send armies for the war. The following immediately came with their armies: Manushan and Khuzan - kings of Pars, Arash - king of Khuziyan, Guranshah - king of Kerman, Sabbah - king of Yaman, Erach - king of Kabul, Shammakh - king of Suri, Tokar - king of Dahestan, Firoz son of Karu Khan, Aveh son of Samaknan, Barate, king son of Garchegan, Bardua and Ardbil, Nastuh, Zehir and armies from Rome, Barbarestan, Baghdad and Khorasan.

With these powerful warriors and armies, ranging from ten thousand to thirty thousand soldiers, King Kae Khushru had a very strong contingent. He entrusted these armies to senior paladins like Rostam, Lohrasp, Arshkash, Gudarz, Toos, Hazir, Fariburz, Dilafroz, Bizan, Rohham, Gurgin, Farhad, Jang-e-Shavran, Zavareh and Karan.

Afrasiyab starts preparations :

Turan was facing a difficult time due to a scarcity of grains and fruits. To heighten that, Afrasiyab received the devastating news of the death of Piran, his brothers and some of his best warriors. He also learnt that most of his soldiers had sought refuge with King Kae Khushru. He was shattered at these news and swore never to sit on the throne till he avenged the death of all his relatives and warriors.

On the other side of the city of Chach, Afrasiyab started making preparations and collecting allies for a war. In his capital Baikand, which was formerly known as Kundez, he collected armies from Machin and China. Warriors also came from Tartar, Balkh and Khallokh. Just then he received the news that King Kae Khushru had reached the Jaihun river with a huge army and his soldiers were swarming all over the place. Afrasiyab immediately prepared for an attack.

Afrasiyab divided his army into two divisions. One, he would lead into the war, and the other, under his son Kara Khan, would remain as a standby in the city of Bokhara and supply food, ammunitions and soldiers to the main army. The Turanian king then crossed the Jaihun river with his huge army, which took a thousand boats one week to transport it across the river. The army proceeded towards the forest of Amu and set up camp at a strategic point near the sea of Gilan.

Afrasiyab further sub-divided his army into two main divisions and other smaller battalions. One division he entrusted to his son Shideh, and the other to his son Jehan. Shideh was assisted by Nastuh, and Jehan by Damur and Jaranjas. Afrasiyab's son Gave-gordgir and brothers Agriras and Karsivaz were given the charge of smaller battalions.

Confrontation :

Through his spies, King Kae Khushru learnt that Afrasiyab had arrived with his army. He advanced his own army towards Kharzam and set his camp near a river in Dahestan. He then had a moat dug between his camp and that of the Turanians and had it filled with water and thorns.

Each army waited for the other to attack. The kings consulted their respective astrologers to determine the right time for launching an attack, and the astrologers advised them to adopt a defensive approach. Three days passed without any action.

On the fourth day Shideh became impatient, and approached Afrasiyab in anger. "Father, I denounce your dependence on astrologers. Brave men don't wait for astrologers to tell them when to fight." Then he started casting aspersions on King Kae Khushru. "I denounce the king of Iran for starting a war with his own maternal grandfather, as a

means of revenge for his father. He is even responsible for the death of Piran who was instrumental in saving his life when he was a child. I want to launch an offensive on the Iranian army and finish off Kae Khushru once and for all.”

After Shideh vented his anger, Afrasiyab tried to pacify him. “Son, you have to be tactful and not instinctive against powerful foes. You are too young to fight against an experienced warrior like King Kae Khushru, let me handle the situation.” Shideh, however, was adamant. He wanted the distinction of fighting against King Kae Khushru, and finally Afrasiyab had to relent. He allowed him to go and fight the king of Iran.

Afrasiyab sent a message along with his son to Kae Khushru requesting him to relinquish the war and become his ally. In case he was not willing to do that, he had to fight a duel with his son or inform him as to how he wanted the war to proceed.

Kae Khushru fights Shideh :

Shideh reached the Iranian camp, and introduced himself as a messenger from Afrasiyab desiring to hand over a message to the Iranian king. Kae Khushru sent Karan to collect the message. Shideh returned back after delivering the message. Kae Khushru went through the message and realised that the offer for peace was just a trick by Afrasiyab to bide time and hence he decided to go for the duel.

Other Iranian warriors requested their king not to go for the duel, for if anything happened to him, there was nobody who could replace him. All of them, except Rustam, advised him to accept the offer of peace. Only the king and Rustam knew the wily Afrasiyab well enough not to come into his tricks.

The king decided to himself go for the duel, as he knew that only a person possessing divine glory could fight a warrior like Shideh who was equipped with powers of black magic and sorcery. He sent a message with Karan to Afrasiyab stating that he was ready for the duel. Afrasiyab was distressed on receiving the message, as he knew it meant an end to the life of his son. He also realised that it would bring him closer to his end.

The next day King Kae Khushru instructed his anxious warriors and advisors not to worry, and if at all anything happened to him they should take instructions from Rustam. Then he entrusted his flag to Rohham and along with him set off on his horse Shabrang for the duel.

He met Shideh on a pre-destined place. From there, they went to a desolate place near the border of Kharzam, and entered into a duel. Shideh was no match for the mighty king, who did not take long to crush Shideh, and end his life. Afrasiyab was greatly distressed on receiving this news and he renewed his pledge to fight the Iranians till the end.

Beginning Of The End For Afrasiyab

Afrasiyab flees :

A war started in full scale between the two camps. Both the kings and all their top warriors plunged into the war, which lasted for three days. There were casualties on both sides, however the Turanians suffered heavier losses. On the third night, Afrasiyab decided to flee the battlefield, and crossed over the Jaihun river with a few of his warriors. When the Turanian soldiers came to know that their king had fled, they too followed him.

The Iranians were surprised to see an empty Turanian camp in the morning. They realised that they may have fled and rejoiced at their victory. However, King Kae Khushru knew that Afrasiyab would attack again, once he regained his strength, so he decided to pursue him till the very end. He informed his grand father in Iran about the victory and his future plans and then crossed the Jaihun river in pursuit of Afrasiyab.

The Turanian army was reduced to twenty percent of its original strength. Afrasiyab met his son Kara Khan who was waiting with the reserve army, and informed him about the heavy losses that his army had suffered. They then proceeded to their palace in Behesht-gang through the cities of Chach and Gulzaryun where Afrasiyab rested for some time.

Kae Khushru enters Turan :

King Kae Khushru reached Turan and halted in the city of Sugdha. However, instead of ravaging the city, he generously helped its inhabitants and won over their hearts. Then he systematically gathered information about Afrasiyab and mobilised his own resources. He sent one troop under Gastaham, consisting of soldiers from Ardbil and Bardeh to Chach, and another troop from Nimroz under Rustam to the forest where Afrasiyab's soldiers were staying.

The army of Sugdha had become loyal to King Kae Khushru. He took that army and another army of the Kushans and advanced further into Turan. He gave strict instructions to his soldiers not to harass any Turk who sought their help, and fight against only those who resisted or attacked them. His armies advanced, winning one fort after another, and finally entered Gulzaryun where he established his camp and sent his undercover agents to gather information.

War erupts again :

Afrasiyab and his warriors in Behesht-gang were taken by surprise when they came to know that the Iranians had come so close to them. They immediately mobilised their forces and went to Gulzaryun to meet the Iranian army under Gastaham.

War started in great earnest with heavy casualties on both sides. However, luck was not in favour of the Turanians as they were hit by a devastating sandstorm and their numbers diminished drastically. At night, the Iranian soldiers triumphantly returned to their camp.

Kae Khushru received good tidings of victory from Gastaham on one side, and on the other side he got the message from Rustam that his army was advancing towards the Turanian capital. With these dual good news, the Iranians were in an upbeat mood. The

king ordered that all his martyred soldiers and warriors be given a dignified funeral. To that effect he had several Dakhmas constructed where their dead bodies were consigned.

Afrasiyab's evil attempt is foiled :

Defeated by Gastaham, Kara Khan barely managed to escape with just sixty soldiers and returned to Afrasiyab. The Turanian king was highly incensed at this defeat, and he decided to seek revenge by perpetrating a 'Shab-e-khun' (massacre at night) on Rustam's army. However, when Kae Khushru got the news about Afrasiyab's empty camps, he understood its implications and immediately sent a messenger to Rustam asking him to be in anticipation of a surprise attack from Afrasiyab.

Rustam was now prepared for the attack. When Afrasiyab went at night with his soldier's into Rustam's camp to take him by surprise, it was he himself who was taken by surprise between Rustam on one side and King Kae Khushru on the other. He had no option but to flee back to his fort in Bahesht-gang.

Afrasiyab immediately sent a message to the Fagfur of China to urgently come to his aid or at least send his troops to assist him. So afraid was he of the Iranians now, that he spared no pains or expenses in strengthening the security at his fort and equipping his soldiers with the best of weapons. Then, like a man who saw his end near, he spent his time in merry-making, not knowing whether the following day would bring life or death for him.

Afrasiyab once again asks for peace :

Kae Khushru followed Afrasiyab along with Rustam and after three weeks reached the fort of Behesht-gang and laid a siege around it. He advised Rustam to attack the fort before help could arrive. When Afrasiyab realised that he was surrounded, he sent his son Jehan with offers of peace in exchange of treasures, kingdoms and his alliance. In his message he pleaded innocence in the killing of Siyavakhsh, saying that the devil had misled him. He implored King Kae Khushru to forget the enmity and take him as his ally.

Kae Khushru, in his reply sent through Jehan, thanked Afrasiyab for his offer and minced no words in calling him a liar who said one thing and did another. He reminded Afrasiyab of all the evils he had perpetrated, and told him that his pleadings for innocence sounded hollow. He asked Afrasiyab to be prepared for the war.

The fort is captured but Afrasiyab escapes :

King Kae Khushru ordered a deep moat to be dug around Afrasiyab's fort. Contraptions for hurling huge stones (canons) were arranged all around the fort. He then had the ground under the walls of the fort dug up, filled with wooden logs and topped with Naphtha oil. After these preparations were complete, he prayed to God, put on his armour and got ready for the war.

King Kae Khushru initiated the attack by hurling huge stones on the fort, which broke its walls. Then he set fire to the logs, which were placed under the walls of the fort. Afrasiyab was devastated by this unprecedented manner of attack, and so were his

soldiers. He boosted up their morale by telling them that a soldier's true fortification is his sword and his shield.

Meanwhile, Kae Khushru instructed Rustam to take some infantry into the fort through the breaches in the wall. They would then make way for the cavalry. Rustam acted accordingly, routed the Turanians and triumphantly hoisted the Iranian flag over the fort. Jehan and Karsivaz were taken prisoners.

Afrasiyab was completely shattered by yet another defeat, and the imprisonment of his son and brother. He bid his throne a tearful farewell, took two hundred soldiers and through a hidden underground route fled into a remote forest where nobody would know of his existence.

Kae Khushru sets up his rule in Turan :

King Kae Khushru entered the palace and immediately launched a search for Afrasiyab, but the wily Turanian king had already left by then. The Iranian king occupied the throne and won the hearts of all Turanians by giving them the much needed justice and reprieve. The queens of Afrasiyab and other ladies in the harem pleaded innocence, and Kae Khushru, in the noble tradition of Iranian kings, set all of them free.

The lion hearted king instructed his soldiers and warriors not to seek revenge on the innocent Turanians, and win their hearts over with love and justice. He generously distributed wealth from the general treasury, but did not open Afrasiyab's personal treasury. He pardoned Afrasiyab's soldiers who had come to him seeking mercy. The allies of Afrasiyab also asked for forgiveness and accepted him as their overlord.

The Iranian king sent the good tidings to his grand father Kae Kaus. Before returning to Iran, he spent some time dispensing justice and relaxing in Turan, indulging in royal recreations like hunting, listening to music and watching dances.

Afrasiyab prepares for an attack :

One day, King Kae Khushru received the news that Afrasiyab had obtained help from his ally the Fagfur of China, had got hold of Piran's treasures from Khotan, mobilised an army and was on his way to attack him.

On getting this news, Kae Khushru immediately entrusted the administration of the fort to Gudarz and Farhad and set out with an army to intercept Afrasiyab. On knowing that the Iranian king was prepared for his attack, Afrasiyab strangely, sent a message of peace, and if that was not acceptable, then a one-to-one duel.

King Kae Khushru replied that Afrasiyab himself had initiated the attack and now there was no looking back. Afrasiyab was now afraid and reluctant to start a war, but King Kae Khushru launched an attack, resulting in heavy casualty on the Turanian side.

When it was dusk and time for the battle to halt, King Kae Khushru realised that an embittered Afrasiyab may resort to Shab-e-khun (massacre at night) and so as a

precautionary measure, he had trenches dug around the Iranian camp. He also had two troops under Rustam and Toos, on either side, ready for an attack at night. He gave strict instructions to all his soldiers not to have any light or sound in the camp.

True to his nature, Afrasiyab prepared a fifty thousand strong army for the Shab-e-khun and sent a spy to ascertain the condition at the Iranian camp. Noticing complete darkness and silence, the spy conveyed to the king that everyone was fast asleep, and the overjoyed Afrasiyab dispatched his soldiers. The unsuspecting Turanian army fell into the trenches and most of them were killed.

When Afrasiyab got this news, with vengeance he launched an attack with the rest of his soldiers, but luck was against him, since as the battle was raging a terrible sand-storm erupted which blinded the Turanian soldiers and flung them from their horses. When Afrasiyab realised that his end was near, he fled with one hundred soldiers. When the rest of the Turanian army realised that they were bereft of a leader, they surrendered themselves to King Kae Khushru who granted them amnesty.

Kae Khushru emerges victorious:

King Kae Khushru acknowledged God's help in this victory and prayed to him from the Zand Avesta. Then he celebrated the victory with wine, music and dance. He had Dakhmas constructed for the soldiers who had died in the war. To the surviving soldiers he distributed lots of wealth.

The Fagfur of China and the king of Khotan now realised that they were allied to the person whose star was on wane. They immediately switched loyalties by sending apologies to King Kae Khushru, along with treasures. The Iranian king generously forgave them but at the same time warned them of dire consequences if they ever decided to switch loyalties again and extend help to Afrasiyab.

Kae Khushru pursues Afrasiyab:

When Afrasiyab learnt that his allies had withdrawn support, he decided to safeguard himself by fleeing deep into the forests. He came near the Asporuz mountain from where he crossed the Zareh river and decided to spend his life there in the wilderness.

King Kae Khushru was aware that Afrasiyab may attack once again and catch him off guard, so he decided to pursue him and bring an end to his life. He disclosed his decision to his soldiers and warriors, who were in a mood of celebration. Tired of the war, they were reluctant to continue, but with Rustam's persuasion they agreed.

Meanwhile Kae Khushru sent Giv to Kae Kaus with a letter, several gifts, ladies from the harem, captured Turanian soldiers, noblemen, and warriors like Jehan and Karsivaz. In the brief letter, it was stated that Giv would personally narrate the happenings in detail.

Giv reached Kae Kaus and conveyed the good tidings with a detailed account of the war. Kae Kaus was overjoyed at this news. He gave due place to the ladies in the harem, imprisoned the defaulters and gave rich rewards to Giv and other warriors. Giv returned

to Kae Khushru with blessings for success from his grand father and the message to pursue Afrasiyab, finish him off and only then return to Iran.

The king entrusted his kingdom in Turan to Gastaham, and along with a small army set off towards China in pursuit of Afrasiyab. He sent messages to the kings of Khotan, China, Makran and other neighbouring provinces not to block the way of his army when it passed their provinces, but to feed them when they came there. All the kings accepted Kae Khushru's proposal, except the king of Makran, who insulted the messenger and drove him away.

King Kae Khushru reached China with his army, where he halted for three months and enjoyed the hospitality of the king who gave them a warm welcome and generous reception with gifts of food and clothes. Rustam stayed back in China and King Kae Khushru proceeded to Makran. He once again reiterated his request for help, but the king of Makran haughtily challenged him to a war.

Kae Khushru responded with an attack, and in the war that ensued the king of Makran was killed along with ten thousand of his soldiers. One thousand soldiers were taken as prisoners. Kae Khushru had the body of the king consigned to a Dakhma with due respect.

Kae Khushru stayed in Makran for one year, and then entrusted the administration of the place to Askash and continued on his mission. He took with him food supply and provisions for a year, as he had to cross the sea of Zareh beyond which Afrasiyab was hiding.

While crossing the sea of Zareh, Kae Khushru and his soldiers were caught in a terrible snowstorm, tossed from one side to another and finally flung into a strange place called Famaulasad. Here they saw strange sights like a cow powerful enough to fight lions, human beings with head of one animal and body of another and men covered with long furry hair.

Finally, when the storm subsided they boarded their boats and crossed the sea of Zareh. After they landed, they passed forests, deserts and vast open grounds before they reached a place inhabited by humans. The people here resembled those of China, but they spoke the language of Makran. The ruler of this place paid his respects and allegiance to the king of Iran. Kae Khushru entrusted the management of this place to Giv and proceeded on his journey.

Afrasiyab escapes once again:

When the king inquired about the whereabouts of Afrasiyab, he was told that he lived in a place called Gangdez, which was built by Siyavakhsh, far away from habitation. They further informed him that Afrasiyab had become very indolent and listless and had just a few soldiers with him. Kae Khushru was very happy that his long and arduous journey had finally been successful.

Somehow, Afrasiyab came to know about King Kae Khushru's arrival and his decision to come to Gangdez. Stealthily, all alone, he fled at night. Meanwhile Kae Khushru had already sent his soldiers in pursuit of Afrasiyab, but he had left before the Iranian soldiers could reach Gangdez, and they could only lay their hands on a few Turanian soldiers who were killed in the skirmish that followed.

When Kae Khushru arrived at that place, he was disappointed by the news that Afrasiyab had once again given them the slip. However, he decided to stay back in Gangdez and enjoy the beauty of the place so painstakingly built by his late father. When a year passed, without any news about Afrasiyab, the king's advisors told him that he should be going back to Iran, since if Afrasiyab managed to gather an army and attack Iran, Kae Kaus will not be in a position to defend.

Kae Khushru returns for Iran :

Kae Khushru realised that his advisors were right and immediately made arrangements to leave for Iran. The king and his retinue crossed the sea of Zareh and reached Makran, where Askash welcomed them. The king arranged for a trustworthy local leader to sit on the throne of Makran, and took Ashkash along with him. From Makran, the king's entourage proceeded to China where Rustam received them. The king entrusted the kingdom to the original ruler who accepted the Iranian king as his sovereign. Then along with Rustam, Kae Khushru proceeded with his retinue to Siyavakhsh-gard, the second city built by Siyavakhsh. There he fondly remembered his father and renewed his resolve to seek Afrasiyab and avenge his father's death.

When Gastaham, who was stationed in Behesht-gang, came to know that his king had come nearby on his return journey, he went to receive him. The king was happy to meet his loyal warrior and he went to Behesht-gang and stayed there for a year. All through this, the king never lost an opportunity to inquire about the whereabouts of Afrasiyab. He also continued to pray to God to help him in his search so that he could fulfil his life's mission.

Finding no trace of the eluding Turanian king, Kae Khushru decided to return to his kingdom. He asked Gastaham to keep a vigilant eye over China and Makran and inform him as soon as he received any information about Afrasiyab. He left via the cities of Chach, Sugdha and Bokhara, crossed the Jaihun river and went to Balkh. From there he traveled through the cities of Talekan, Marvarud, Nishapur, Damghan, Rae and Baghdad and finally arrived in his capital at Pars.

King Kae Khushru was warmly received by his grandfather Kae Kaus, and they updated each other about news from their respective sides. There was a lavish celebration, which lasted for seven days. Then, Kae Khushru and Kae Kaus went to the fire temple of Azar Abadagan where the fire of Azar Gushasp was burning. They prayed Avesta for several weeks and then returned after more than a month.

Haoma captures Afrasiyab :

The terrified Afrasiyab was running from place to place without proper food or sleep. He

finally made his home in a cave in a mountain near the city of Barda. Nearby was the place of worship of Haoma, a pious man who was a descendant of king Faridun. Once Haoma overheard a loud wailing sound and went to investigate.

Haoma saw an old man lamenting the loss of his throne, crown, kingdom and army. From his looks and Turkish language, he immediately recognised him as the fugitive Turanian king. He pounced to capture him. Afrasiyab struggled desperately to set himself free, but was overpowered by Haoma who bound him with the Kushti (woolen waistband) that he was wearing on his waist as a symbol of Mazdayasni religion.

Afrasiyab once again escapes :

Afrasiyab implored Haoma to set him free, but the powerful Haoma did not release him. Then the cunning Afrasiyab touched a sympathetic chord in Haoma's heart. He requested him to loosen his bonds, saying that his hands were bruised. Haoma sympathised for the old man and loosened his bonds. No sooner were the bonds loosened, Afrasiyab shook them off his hands and plunged into the Khunjast (Chaechast, according to Avesta) river.

Haoma decided that he would not move from that place till someone arrived. He shouted for help and luckily Giv, Gudarz and some other warriors, who happened to pass by, immediately came there. Haoma narrated to them all that had happened and Gudarz rushed to inform the king at the fire-temple of Azar Gushasp where he had gone to pray with his grand father. The two immediately came to the place where Haoma was waiting.

Haoma once again narrated to them how he had identified and captured Afrasiyab, and how he managed to escape. The king profusely thanked him for his patriotism. When Afrasiyab did not surface from the water after several hours, Haoma suggested that his brother Karsivaz be brought there. Hearing his voice, Afrasiyab may come out to see him.

End of Afrasiyab's life:

As per Haoma's suggestion, Karsivaz was brought there. When he came to know that his brother was underwater, he started wailing and cursed him for his misfortunes. On hearing the voice of his brother, Afrasiyab came out of the water and Haoma quickly secured him with his lasso, pulled him out and handed him over to Kae Khushru.

Afrasiyab knew that his game was up, but still he made one last ditch attempt to save his life. "Kae Khushru, don't forget that I am your grandfather, and you cannot put me to death," he reasoned.

"Where was this relationship when you got your son-in-law killed mercilessly, and were about to end the life of your daughter and grandson?" Kae Khushru reminded him.

Afrasiyab immediately changed the tone of his voice and started pleading, "Have mercy on an old man who has faced many difficulties in life." But Kae Khushru did not heed his hollow pleas as he knew this to be one more of his ploy. He was now determined to take his life for having killed his father.

Afrasiyab then tried another stratagem. He entreated, "Grant me one final request. Take me to my daughter Ferangez, as I desire to see her one last time." Kae Khushru was, aware that Afrasiyab was just biding his time and waiting for yet another opportunity to escape, so he replied, "Your time has come to meet your maker, and I know you too well to come into your words. An experienced hunter never lets a wounded lion loose, because he is a terrible threat to his life." So saying, Kae Khushru himself put an end to Afrasiyab's life with one swift and powerful stroke of his sword. He then ordered his executioner to end the life of Karsivaz too.

The death of Afrasiyab was a cause for immense celebration. Kae Khushru first went to the fire temple, offered thanks to the fire, and bestowed gifts of gold over there. He then ordered Zarasp, his treasurer, to give wealth freely to priests, pious persons and all other needy people. He told his people to take a break from their work, go out into the open and celebrate this auspicious occasion. The king himself celebrated for forty days with his noblemen and warriors, and then returned to Pars.

Death of Kae Kaus :

Having seen the death of his son avenged before his very eyes, Kae Kaus was now a contented man. He passed away peacefully at the age of about a hundred and fifty years. There was mourning for forty days, after which King Kae Khushru resumed his duties.

Jehan is made the king of Turan :

Jehan, the son of Afrasiyab was a noble and religious man. After resuming the throne, King Kae Khushru summoned him courteously, informed him about his father's death, expressed regrets about it and said that his father had died because of his evil ways, but if he was loyal to Iran, he had nothing to fear. Jehan said that he was aware that the king of Iran was just and his life was safe. He promised to always be faithful and loyal to him.

King Kae Khushru expressed his desire of making Jehan the king of Turan, provided he continued to be noble and righteous. Jehan assured him of his sincerity and truthfulness, and promised the king that he would regularly meet him and send taxes and gifts.

Before leaving, Jehan requested the king to send back the queens and ladies of the harem, which included his sisters and other relatives. The king granted his request and coronated him in his court by his own hands. He then asked Jehan to leave for Turan and sent with him a letter addressed to Gastaham, asking him to hand over the kingdom to Jehan and return peacefully to Iran.

Jehan set off for Turan with his entourage, which included warriors, soldiers and ladies of the harem, and was welcomed there by Gastaham. After reading his king's letter, Gastaham gave Jehan his due place. There were celebrations for two weeks for the new king and then Gastaham was sent off respectfully with many gifts for himself and the king. He was welcomed in Iran by Toos and other warriors. He then went to the king and handed over the gifts, which the king generously distributed among his subjects.

A Unique End To Kae Khushru's Reign

King Kae Khushru goes in seclusion :

Sixty years of King Kae Khushru's reign passed very smoothly without any war or strife. As days passed, he started devoting more and more time to matters relating to the spiritual world. He kept himself immersed in thoughts of God and His workings. He started worrying that grandeur and inactivity may breed vices in him, like it had done in the case of Zohak, Jamshed, Tur and Salem, or he may become indifferent to God and perform foolish or unjust acts like Kae Kaus or Afrasiyab. He was worried that due to some fault of his, the Khoreh (divine Glory) that he had so painstakingly achieved, may leave him. Hence, he decided that before anything like that could happen, he should leave his life and kingdom at his own will.

The king started putting his plan into practice. He ordered his court officials and advisors not to direct anybody to him for any work, and retired into a life of quietude and tranquility. He relinquished his royal robes and started wearing white clothes. Instead of attending court, he spent days and at times weeks in prayers and returned exhausted but satisfied. The court officials, warriors and senior paladins were worried about this change in their king and started conjecturing about his strange behaviour.

The warriors are puzzled :

After some time, the king resumed the throne and allowed visitors to come and see him. Senior warriors like Toos, Gudarz, Giv and Bizan were worried that they might have offended the king. Hence they went to the king and inquired the reason for his strange behaviour in the previous weeks.

The king assured them that they were not at fault in any way. In response to their questions about his behaviour, he told them cryptically that after achieving everything in life he had a secret desire and he requested all of them to pray that it may be fulfilled. He then once again issued orders that he should not be disturbed and slipped into another period of quietude.

Giv seeks Rustam's help :

When Kae Khushru did not return from his seclusion for more than a week, the warriors were worried. Gudarz considered it a serious matter and wondered whether the demons had taken possession and were misleading their king, as they had done to Kae Kaus in the earlier part of his reign. He sent his son Giv to Zabulistan to inform Zal and Rustam about the strange behaviour of their king, as he felt that they were the only persons who could talk to their king and bring him back to his senses. He requested Zal and Rustam to treat this as urgent and come immediately. No sooner did Zal and Rustam receive this message, they set off for Iran.

The second seclusion :

On the eighth day, the king came out of his seclusion and summoned court. The warriors were eager to know whether he would reveal his secret desire. They offered to help him in any way that he wanted them to. King Kae Khushru, thanked them for their heartfelt

offer, but told them that they will not be able to help him in any way to achieve his secret desire. He then respectfully bade them farewell and once again went into seclusion

The third seclusion :

This time, King Kae Khushru went into seclusion for a longer period of five weeks. He was now very perseverant about the fulfillment of his desire. One night, while he was asleep, Sarosh Yazad appeared to him and said, “O worthy king! Your persistence has paid. Your secret desire of getting a place next to God in heaven has been granted. Now you should make preparations to leave the world. But before that, you have an important task to fulfill. Give a part of your wealth to poor and deserving persons, and entrust your kingdom to a worthy man. It is suggested that you select the just, gentle and noble warrior Lohrasp as your successor.”

The king rose up from his sleep, ecstatic that his secret desire had been fulfilled. He started his preparations for leaving the world by relinquishing his jewels, crown and royal robes.

Zal and Rustam reach Iran :

Anxious and distressed, Zal and Rustam reached Iran after six weeks. Senior warriors received them, and immediately started pouring their hearts out. They told them that they were worried about their king who was getting weaker and losing all interest in life. Zal consoled them and asked them to have patience, saying he would meet the king and try and understand his problems.

The next day King Kae Khushru attended court and welcomed Zal, Rustam and other wise men and astrologers who had come from Kanoj, Dambar, Marg and May to ascertain the reason for the king’s disenchantment with life and throne. The king informed everybody present that he had taken the decision to leave his kingdom, now that his desire had been fulfilled as per the message given to him by Sarosh Yazad.

Zal understands his king :

Zal was taken aback at this decision, unprecedented in the history of Iranian kings. He pledged to the distraught Iranians that he would try his best to dissuade the king from taking such a drastic step. He went with a few senior warriors to the king and castigated him in a stern voice for taking such an irresponsible decision, which may bring great difficulties on himself and his country. He warned the king that he might be under the influence of demons and evil spirits.

The king patiently heard Zal and other warriors, pacified them and assured them that their fears were unfounded. He explained his position and aspirations to them, and clarified that he was doing God’s work and there was nothing evil about it, as it did not harm anybody.

Zal realised that he had needlessly castigated his noble and righteous king. He not only sought his forgiveness, but also approved of his decision. The king knew that Zal had spoken to him in a stern voice, not out of disrespect but due to his love and affection for

him. He at once forgave him and made him sit next to his throne.

The final farewell :

The king ordered a big camp to be set up where he would declare his last will and testament before setting on his mission. As per his instructions, all his subjects gathered in the camp in a huge open field. The king came with a mace in his hand and set on his throne. He was surrounded by his dedicated warriors Zal, Rustam, Giv, Gudarz, Bizan, Toos, Farhad and Shapur.

Amidst expectant faces, the king announced his decision to quit the world. He said that he had called this camp to reward all those who had helped him. The Iranian people were taken aback by this decision, unprecedented in the history of Iran. Due to their inability to understand their king's decision, they became pensive and a gloom of silence spread over the gathering. Then Zal stepped forward, explained to the people the exalted position and spiritual aspirations of their king, and requested them to respect his sentiments and decision.

The king asked his people to enjoy themselves for seven days. On the eighth day, he once again ascended the throne, but this time without his royal robe, crown and scepter. He nominated Gudarz as the Trustee of his treasures and asked him to spend them wisely for public utility works like building and repairing rest houses, roads, bridges and water reservoirs, social welfare activities like helping orphans, widows and aged people and religious activities like maintaining fire temples.

The king distributed his personal effects like clothes, jewels, weapons, armours, horses, gardens and palaces amongst his favourite warriors. He further requested them to ask for wishes, as now time had come for him to repay their services and bid them farewell. The entire nation was drowned in sobs of tears on hearing these touching words of farewell.

Fearing the attitude of future rulers towards them, Zal requested the king to give Rustam a notification with royal attestation, declaring him to be the king of Nimroz. Gudarz too requested the king to give a similar attestation to Giv, declaring him to be the king of Kum and Esfahan. The king obliged them accordingly.

Toos, gave an account of his services to the Kayanian kings, and requested Kae Khushru to assure his position as the future commander of the Iranian army, bearer of the Kayanian banner and a wearer of golden shoes (a mark of royalty). King Kae Khushru gave him this written assurance and also bestowed on him the province of Khorasan.

Lohrasp, the successor :

The emperor then went towards Lohrasp, and placed the crown on his head, and declared him his successor. He advised him to be just, noble and truthful.

This decision of the king infuriated the warriors, who, under the leadership of Zal, challenged his decision. They said, "How can Lohrasp, who does not even have a small kingdom to his name, be made the king. How can a nascent warrior surpass the rights of

all other senior and older warriors?”

The king assuaged his warriors and said, “My dear worthy warriors. Lohrasp is a product of nobility being a descendant of Kae Kobad and Kae Pashin. He is selected on the basis of his sterling qualities of religiosity, temperance, divinity, lineage, generosity, patience and liveliness. Above all, Sarosh Yazad himself has recommended him to be my successor.”

When Zal heard this, he felt sorry for rebelling against the decision of his righteous and just king. He apologised to him and accepted Lohrasp as the successor. Other warriors also followed suit.

However, the appointment of the new king did not bring any cheer on the faces of the Iranian people. They were all mourning the departure of their favourite king. The four queens of Kae Khushru were very much worried about their life and welfare. Kae Khushru instructed Lohrasp to care for them, keep them in his palace as long as they lived and see that no harm came to them.

Kae Khushru's final journey :

After fulfilling all his worldly duties, Kae Khushru proceeded towards the forest accompanied by his best warriors Zal, Rustam, Gudarz, Giv, Bizan, Gastaham, Fariborz and Toos. They were followed by priests, soldiers and thousands of his subjects including women and children.

They reached a mountain and rested there for a week, as if everyone wanted to lengthen the final moment of departure. The people still had hopes that they may be able to convince their king to stay back. The king was very much moved by the love and devotion of his subjects, but he told them that whatever was happening was for everybody's good.

The king requested his subjects to return, as the road ahead was very difficult and strenuous. Zal, Rustam and Gudarz stayed back on the mountain with the rest of the people after bidding their king a final tearful farewell. However, the other five warriors Giv, Bizan, Gastaham, Fariborz and Toos insisted on going along with their king, inspite of his dissuading them not to do so.

The king and the warriors then proceeded further for a day and came to a stream where they rested. He told his loyal warriors to sit and chat with him, for this was the last time anybody would see him. Early the next morning he will leave them forever to meet Sarosh Yazad. The king further told them that he would get up to pray at midnight, after which he could no more be seen by human eyes. He instructed them to depart back early in the morning, as later in the day there would be a terrible snowstorm, after which they would never be able to return to Iran. Then they retired for the night.

The next morning when the five warriors woke up, Kae Khushru was no more with them. They searched everywhere for him but could find no trace, not even footprints, of

their king. Exhausted after the search they rested there discussing the strange disappearance of their king. Fariburz reminded them about the king's warning regarding the snowstorm, but they did not take it seriously because the climate was warm, and such a climate did not portend a snowstorm.

Five warriors perish :

After some time they laid down to rest and fell asleep. They did not realise when a severe snowstorm started all of a sudden, and before they could realise, they were buried alive in the snow.

Zal and Rustam waited on the mountain for seven days for their return. Then they concluded that they may not have heeded the king's warning and perished in the snowstorm. Giv was heartbroken as his son and grandson had both perished. They returned to Iran, and soon after sent a search party, but all that they could get were their dead bodies, which were brought to Iran and laid to rest in the Dakhma.

4. KING LOHRASP

Lohrasp ascends the throne :

The news of Kae Khushru's disappearance spread like wild fire in the country. Lohrasp decided to occupy the throne as per Kae Khushru's wishes, but before that, he asked the senior warriors whether they had any objections. Zal, Rustam and Gudarz assured him that since they had given their word to Kae Khushru, they would give him their whole-hearted support and be loyal to him. Lohrasp chose the day Meher of the month Meher for his coronation, and after an impressive ceremony ascended the throne.

Lohrasp was a religious person. He spent a lot of time in the fire temple at Balkh, where prophet Zarhost also prayed. Lohrasp's queen Azadeh was the daughter of the warrior Gastaham, and the grand daughter of Peshdadian king Navzar. Lohrasp had two distinguished sons Gushtasp and Zarir, but he was more fond of his predecessor king Kae Khushru's grandsons since he owed his crown to him. Due to this attitude of his father, Gustasp was always unhappy as he felt a sense of insecurity to his right to the throne.

One day, when Lohrasp was in a pleasant mood, Gushtasp approached him with a request to nominate him as his successor. Lohrasp, however, felt that it was too early for such an appointment and turned down the request. Gushtasp went away disgruntled, lamenting that his father favoured others over his own son.

Gushtasp leaves Iran :

Gushtasp was disappointed with his father and decided to leave Iran. He took three hundred soldiers and secretly marched off towards Hindustan, whose king had given him an open invitation to come whenever he wanted. When Lohrasp learnt about his son's absence, he was very much grieved, not only because he felt let down by his own son, but also because he feared that his fair name would be tarnished in the world.

He immediately dispatched his other son Zarir and two other warriors Gastaham and Gorazeh with small troops to look for his wayward son. Zarir was sent towards

Hindustan, Gastaham towards Rome and Gorazeh towards China.

Zarir brings Gushtasp back :

Gushtasp had stopped at Kabul on his way to Hindustan, when Zarir caught up with him and entreated him to return to Iran. He told Gushtasp that astrologers had predicted his future greatness and said that he was the future king of Iran. He further admonished his brother saying that it did not befit a Mazdayasni prince to stay under the non-Mazdayasni king of Hindustan.

Gushtasp reluctantly returned with his brother and apologised to his father for his irresponsible behaviour. He further assured him that he will be obedient to him. The whole kingdom rejoiced at the return of their prince.

Gushtasp leaves Iran again :

As time went by Gushtasp's insecurity crept back. He felt that his father's attitude towards him had still not changed, and so once again he decided to leave Iran, but this time all alone and in disguise.

At night, when the palace had become quiet, Gushtasp dressed in a Chinese gown, wore a feathered head-dress for camouflage, took some gold coins and set off on his horse Shabdiz towards Rome. When Lohrasp learnt of Gushtasp's absence the next day, he was very much aggrieved. He consulted his advisors who counseled that Gushtasp should be made the king once he returned.

Gushtasp Goes To Rome

Gushtasp arrives in Rome :

Gushtasp reached the sea separating Iran from Rome. On seeing an aged boatman he asked his name. The boatman introduced himself as Hishui. Gushtasp presented himself as a scribe on his way to Rome and requested Hishui to ferry him free. However, the experienced Hishui realised from Gushtasp's countenance and build that he was from a royal family and demanded his fees from Gushtasp, who had to unwillingly part with a few of his scarce coins. He was then ferried across the sea.

The prince is jobless :

In Rome, Gushtasp came to a place established by Selam, son of the Peshdadian king Faridun. Without a roof on his head and food in his stomach, he desperately started looking for a job, without any success. Days passed, and his scarce resources were over.

He went to one of the Kaisar's ministers, and introduced himself as a scribe. But the minister drove him out saying he looked more like a warrior than a scribe. Dejected, he met Nastar, the Kaisar's herdsman, and requested to be employed as a horse-rider. However, as he was a stranger, his request was rejected.

Disappointed, Gushtasp went to the keeper of camels asking for work, but looking at his royal stature, the keeper too turned him down. However, as he was a sympathetic person he advised him to go to the Kaisar and even offered him a camel and a guide for his

journey. But, Gushtasp was apprehensive of going to the Kaisar as he suspected that his identity would be revealed, and so he declined the offer.

He then went to the workshop of Burab, a wealthy blacksmith. He had thirty-five helpers who put shoes on the Kaisar's horses. Gustasp was given employment, but as soon as he struck with his hammer, his anvil broke into two on account of his tremendous strength. The blacksmith requested him to leave, as he was too strong for the job.

Disappointed, Gushtasp went into a meadow and was sitting there when the village headman identified his royal features and asked him who he was. Gushtasp identified himself as a descendant of Faridun, at which the headman was elated and he invited him to his house. Gushtasp stayed there for several months.

Gushtasp weds Katabun :

The Kaisar had a strange tradition of selecting a groom for his princess. Princes and noblemen from all around were invited. The princess would walk amongst them, select her groom for herself and then place a crown on his head.

Katabun, the eldest of the three princesses of the Kaisar, was to select her groom the next day. Hence princes and noblemen were invited from far and near by the Kaisar. That night, Katabun, who was lovingly also called Nahid, had a dream in which she saw a handsome prince and she decided that he alone would be her husband.

The next day the invitees assembled in the main hall of the palace. Katabun went around the princes, but her eyes were looking for the prince she had dreamt the night before, whom she could not find. The following day, the Kaisar invited many more noblemen, and Gushtasp's host was one of them.

The noblemen once again collected in the palace hall. Gushtasp's host had taken Gushtasp along with him, and he was sitting in a corner as a commoner, watching the proceedings. When princess Katabun set off to choose her husband, her eyes fell on Gushtasp, and she realised that this was the man of her dream. She immediately went to him and put the crown on his head.

When the Kaisar received the news that his daughter had selected a commoner for her husband, he was furious. "How dare my daughter select such a husband. Let both of them be execute,." he thundered.

The wise Minister intervened and told the king, "Your highness, your daughter has not done anything wrong. She has just acted on your command, and hence she is not at fault." The Kaisar, amazed at this defense, asked his Minister to explain. "O noble one !" the Minister clarified, "You had told your daughter to 'Select a groom', and not 'Select a nobleman', and hence she is not at fault." The furious Kaisar softened down, but he was in no mood to forgive them, so he ordered both of them to be driven out of the palace.

The village headman who was Gushtasp's host, was kind enough to make provisions to

take them to his home, where the two newly weds shared moments of joy and sorrow. They eked out their livelihood with great difficulty. The princess sold off most of her jewels. Gushtasp went hunting everyday to bring home food.

Once when Gushtasp was returning from a hunt, he met the boatman Hishui, who was returning home disappointed as he did not have a successful hunt and was returning home empty handed. Gushtasp shared the spoils of his hunt with him and thus made him a friend. This trend of sharing his spoils with Hishui and the village headman continued and thus Gushtasp made two very good friends in Rome.

Mirin seeks the princess' hand :

There lived in Rome a nobleman named Mirin, who descended from the lineage of Selam and who was a highly learned historian and astrologer. He requested the Kaisar to have him married to his second daughter. But now, the Kaisar wanted the proof of the nobility and bravery of the suitor, so he said that henceforth he would give the hands of his remaining two daughters only to the person who performed heroic deeds. To Mirin, he assigned the task of slaying a huge wolf in the forest of Farkun, and get evidence thereof. This wolf was said to be mightier than an elephant and harassed all those who went to the forest.

Mirin knew that he would not be able to accomplish such a task, so he sought the help of wise men and astrologers who advised him to seek the help of an Iranian prince residing in Rome who was destined to perform three mighty tasks. The first task would be to marry the princess against the wishes of the Kaisar, and the other two would be slaying two deadly animals that had been harassing the people of Rome.

Mirin approaches Gushtasp :

Now it was easy for Mirin to track down the Iranian prince, as he was aware of the marriage of Katabun, the first daughter of the Kaisar, and the person mentioned by the astrologers had to be her husband. Mirin happened to know Hishui and he knew that the Iranian prince was his friend, so he went to Hishui's house to inquire about him.

Hishui welcomed his royal friend, who started inquiring about Gushtasp. Hishui told Mirin that Gushtasp was a very brave man and fond of hunting. After his hunts, he invariably came to meet him. So if he wanted to meet the Iranian prince, he should wait for some time. True enough, by dusk Gushtasp came galloping on his horse. Just by his looks Mirin was impressed and he knew that this strong and powerful man was destined for mighty tasks. Hishui introduced Mirin to Gushtasp.

Gushtasp asked him the reason why he had sought him and come to meet him from so far. Mirin narrated to him his desire to marry the princess and the Kaisar's condition. Then, describing the beast, he said, "Friend, I seek your help in killing this mighty wolf."

On hearing the description, Gushtasp smiled and said, "O noble Mirin ! The animal you describe is not a wolf. We call it an Azdah. Get me Selam's sword and a strong horse and lead me to the hideout of the beast, and I will kill it. Let me tell you, as of now, no

Roman warrior has been able to kill an Azdah.”

The next day Mirin brought the sword, a horse, an armour and helmet and lots of other gifts and jewels for Gushtasp. Gushtasp took the sword, horse, armour and helmet, but gave away the gifts and jewels to Hishui. Then Mirin and Hishui led him to the forest of Farkun. Mirin reminded Gushtasp to get the evidence of slaying the beast, as required by the Kaisar.

Gushtasp slays the beast :

As the trio approached the forest of Farkun, the two Romans were afraid of going any further. They pointed the hideout of the beast from a distance and told Gushtasp to proceed alone, saying they would wait for him over there.

Gushtasp went near the place, alighted from his horse and prayed to God to help him in this difficult task. Not sighting the beast, he went further into the forest challenging the beast to come out to fight him. On hearing his voice, the hideous beast let out a blood-curdling scream and came out to face Gushtasp, who started shooting arrows at it.

The beast was severely wounded, but it continued to approach Gushtasp and stretched its long neck to bite him. When Gushtasp jumped off the horse, in anger the beast pierced its huge saber-like teeth into the horse rendering it lifeless. Gushtasp realised that time was running out for him, it was his life against the beast. He immediately drew his sword, lunged at the beast, and with a swift and powerful stroke cut it into two. Then, as required by the Kaisar, he removed the beast's skin and teeth as evidence, and after thanking God, embarked on his return journey on foot.

Mirin and Hishui, who were waiting for Gushtasp at some distance, rejoiced on seeing him. Gushtasp narrated to them how he had overcome the beast and asked them to come and see the huge monster. Gushtasp expressed his surprise as to how such a huge beast had managed to survive for so long, and whether there were no brave men in Rome.

The two Romans were awe-struck at the sight of the gigantic beast. They greatly appreciated Gushtasp's strength and bravery and then returned to their respective homes. Gushtasp however, did not disclose to Katabun where he had been. That night he saw the beast in his dream and woke up, with a start. When Katabun inquired he told her that he saw days of good fortune ahead of them, to achieve which he would have to go back to Iran. Katabun, however was not very keen on this idea as she feared that Gushtasp may never return from Iran.

Meanwhile Mirin went to the Kaisar with the skin and teeth of the beast, which he claimed to have slain. The Kaisar was very much impressed by Mirin, and insisted on seeing the huge beast himself. He went to the forest of Farkun, and at the sight of the gigantic beast greatly appreciated Mirin's bravery and had his daughter married to him.

A suitor for the third princess :

A nobleman by the name Ahran, approached the Kaisar for the hand of his third daughter. As per his policy, the Kaisar asked him to perform an act of bravery. This time he asked the suitor to kill the Azdah on mount Sakila, and get its dead body back for him to see.

Ahran knew that he would never be able to accomplish this task, and so he approached Mirin for help. Mirin revealed to him his secret and asked him to get in touch with Hishui who would introduce him to the brave Iranian warrior who had helped him.

Gushtasp to the rescue :

Hishui introduced Ahran to Gushtasp, who agreed to slay the Azdah. He asked for a poisoned dagger, a mace, and an armoured horse, which were provided to him. Then the three proceeded towards mount Sakila.

When they approached the abode of the beast, Hishui and Ahran were reluctant to go further and pointed the abode of the Azdah to Gushtasp from a distance. Gushtasp went alone on the mountain and challenged the Azdah, who came out of its hiding place on hearing his voice. Gushtasp started showering arrows at it, and when it came near to bite him, he thrust the poisoned dagger in its mouth. The Azdah chewed on the dagger, and thus not only poisoned itself, but also hurt its mouth which started bleeding at several places. Gushtasp dealt one final blow to the beast, smashing its head with his mace.

Then he went to Ahran and Hishui and told them about his conquest. Ahran was jubilant. He dragged the Azdah on a cart and took it to the Kaisar, who, as promised, had him married to his youngest daughter. The Kaisar was very proud of his two brave son-in-laws and sent the message of their triumph to all the princes and noblemen in his kingdom.

One day, Katabun persuaded Gushtasp to go to the Kaisar and make him aware of his tremendous potential, to which Gushtasp reluctantly agreed. He went to the arena where noblemen were playing polo, and after taking permission, went to play with them.

Gushtasp proved to be far superior to all others and dazzled everybody with his strength and skills. The envious noblemen attacked him with swords, but Gushtasp bravely fought them off. The Kaisar, who was a spectator to all this, was highly impressed by the heroics of this stranger. He summoned him and asked him about his identity.

Gushtasp identified himself as Farrokhzad, the unfortunate elder son-in-law of the Kaisar. Then he revealed to the Kaisar that it was he who had slain the beast and the Azdah and not the other two son-in-laws about whom he took such pride. He further asked the Kaisar to summon Hishui for confirmation. The Kaisar did likewise and was convinced by Gushtasp's story. He felt sorry for the harsh treatment meted out to his eldest daughter Kartabun, and invited her to the palace. He gave both of them their due place and made Gushtasp his senior administrator. He also penalised his other two son-in-laws for deceiving him.

War with Khazar :

The Kaisar now felt much empowered with the powerful Iranian by his side. Iliyas son of Mehras of the neighbouring kingdom of Khazar, had become a thorn in his flesh and had stopped paying taxes. He sent a message to Iliyas, asking him to restart paying taxes.

On receiving the message, the brave Iliyas challenged the Kaisar to a war. The Kaisar asked his other son-in-laws Mirin and Ahran to assist him, but they backed out. Gushtasp, however assured the Kaisar that he was by his side and he should go ahead with the war. He however, cautioned the Kaisar not to trust his other son-in-laws and not involve them in any war in future.

The next day Gushtasp set off with an army to defend Rome, along with the Kaisar and his son Sakil. Iliyas, on seeing the mighty Gushtasp, thought of buying him off and sent a message to him assuring him a kingdom if he came over to his side. The loyal Gushtasp not only rejected this offer, but also castigated Iliyas for starting the war.

Rome emerges victorious :

On the second day of the war, Iliyas came face to face with Gushtasp, and was mortally wounded. Gushtasp dragged him and handed him over to the Kaisar. Thereafter he went back to the enemy folds, wrought havoc there and won the war in no time. The Kaisar was very pleased with him.

Now, with Gushtasp by his side, the Kaisar wanted to consolidate his power in all the adjoining kingdoms. He wanted to collect taxes even from Iran and he informed Gushtasp of his intentions.

Messenger to Iran :

The Kaisar sent a messenger to king Lohrasp threatening him to pay huge annual taxes or be prepared for a war. When Lohrasp received this message, he was surprised at the sudden change of attitude of the Kaisar who till recently was subserviently paying taxes to others. The Iranian king prepared a feast for the messenger, and taking him into confidence asked, "Tell me, how is it that your king has suddenly become so powerful as to dominate and threaten all his neighbours?"

The messenger told Lohrasp, "A brave young man from yonder seas has come to Rome, and it is with his support that the Kaisar is launching and winning all his campaigns." The messenger further said, "This young man has married the eldest of the Roman princesses and has killed a huge beast and an Azdah which no other Roman had dared to go near."

Lohrasp was excited by this news as he felt the stranger may be his son Gushtasp. To further strengthen his contention, he asked, "Tell me, O worthy messenger! Whom does this stranger resemble?" On seeing Zarir nearby, the messenger pointed to him and said, "He very closely resembles this nobleman, not only by face, but by height, body, speech and mannerisms too."

On hearing this, Lohrasp was as happy as a dead man regaining his life. He was now sure

that it was his son Gushtasp who was the stranger in Rome. He gave the messenger lots of gifts and told him to tell his king to be ready for an attack from Iran.

The king also sent Zarir to the Kaisar asking him not to disturb the tradition of subservience to Iran, or the consequences would be serious. He also invited Gushtasp to come back and occupy the throne of Iran. Zarir left with a small army comprising warriors like Behram, Shapur, Rivniz and Giv's sons Shirui and Ardeshir. They went through the province of Halab, crossed the sea and entered Rome. Zarir asked his army to wait on the shores, and with a few trusted advisors went to the Kaisar's court.

Zarir goes to Rome:

In the Kaisar's court, Zarir and Gushtasp came face to face, but each of them maintained a veil of secrecy. Zarir delivered the message to the Kaisar, who waited for Gushtasp's reaction, but when Gushtasp did not respond, the Kaisar, who was by now very confident of himself, challenged Zarir for a war.

After Zarir left, the Kaisar turned to Gushtasp and inquired, "May I know, young man, why you did not respond to the challenge of the Iranian as you always do?" Gushtasp diplomatically replied, "Your Highness! I was in Iran before I came to Rome and hence I happen to know Zarir and some other Iranian warriors. I wish to talk to them in private, because I feel I will be able to convince them to accept your superiority." The Kaisar was pleased on hearing this, and allowed Gushtasp to go to meet Zarir.

When Gushtasp went to the Iranian camp, the entire camp was jubilant on seeing their prince after a long time. Zarir came forward to meet his brother, and the two locked each other in a tight embrace. "Dear brother," Gushtasp regretfully said, "First of all, let me apologise for the pain I have caused you and others."

"Forget whatever that has happened and come back to Iran," Zarir assured his brother. He further added, "Our father wants you to become the king as soon as possible so that he can retire and spend his time in prayers. He has also sent a crown and throne for you as gifts." Gushtasp was very happy on seeing these symbolic gifts. He put on the crown, occupied the throne and sent for the Kaisar.

Gushtasp returns to Iran :

The Kaisar came to the Iranian camp and was surprised on seeing a beaming Gushtasp sitting on the throne amidst the Iranians. The truth was soon revealed to him, and he became very happy on knowing the true identity of his eldest son-in-law.

Gushtasp then sent for Katabun, who was amazed at these sudden developments. Together they set off for Iran, but before leaving, Gushtasp assured the Kaisar of cordial relations and pledged that he will not ask for taxes as long as he occupied the throne of Iran. The Kaisar was very happy at these developments and happily bid them farewell.

After a short time, Gushtasp and Zarir reached Iran. Lohrasp was very happy at being

reunited with his lost son. Both the father and son forgot the past, and Lohrasp himself instituted Gushtasp on the throne.

5 KING GUSHTASP

In the Avesta scriptures, Gushtasp is known as Vishtaspa, and his queen Katabun (also pronounced Katayun) is known by the name Hutaosa. Some time after becoming the queen of Iran, Katabun gave birth to two sons - Aspandiyar and Peshotan.

Conflict with Arjasp :

Gushtasp ruled his kingdom justly and with a firm hand. Except for Arjasp the king of Turan, Turkestan and China, all other neighbouring kings accepted his sovereignty and gave him one fourth of their wealth as taxes.

Arjasp was the grandson of Afrasiyab, and the son of Jehan. He not only declined to give him taxes, but on the contrary challenged his superiority and demanded taxes, to which the Iranian king had to reluctantly agree.

Prophet Zartosht

Emergence of Prophet Zartosht :

In the reign of king Gushtasp emerged a very auspicious and pious person by the name Zartosht, who is known by the name Zarathushtra in Avesta scriptures. This man had been completely successful in shackling 'Ahriman' - the evil spirit, and his notorious activities.

King Gushtasp invited Zartosht to his court on account of his spiritual power, enlightened learning and understanding of the fundamental principles of the world. Zartosht brought a divine fire from the spiritual world, which he called 'Meher Burzin'. This divine fire burnt without fuel and did not scorch on being touched.

Zartosht is accepted as the Prophet :

King Gushtasp was highly influenced by Zartosht's divine powers. Zartosht gave him the divine message that would lead him to God. He asked king Gushtasp to accept the omniscience and omnipotence of God. The king was highly impressed by the divine personality of the prophet, and he accepted his message and religion, which was but a rectified and enhanced version of the king's ancestral Mazdayasni religion.

Prince Zarir, ex-king Lohrasp and other leaders, noblemen and warriors followed the example of their king. They wore the sacred girdle (Kushti) as a mark of accepting the prophet and his message. They were utterly surprised at the transformation they underwent after accepting the message of Prophet Zartosht. They had become devoid of evil, and divine glory permeated their being.

Prophet Zartosht brings about beneficial changes :

Before the advent of Prophet Zartosht, there was a widespread practice of black magic and sorcery. People were prone to invoking the black side of nature and worshipping

idols as gods. Prophet Zartosht stopped all this and taught the people that there is only one God - Ahura Mazda, and he alone should be worshipped.

Zartosht taught the people to adopt Dokhmenashini, the system of disposal of the dead, which largely curbed the evil ones and their practices of black magic and sorcery. The children that were born to people who had accepted the message of Prophet Zartosht were sinless and innocent.

King Gushtasp promotes the religion of Prophet Zartosht :

So impressed was king Gushtasp by the beneficial changes brought about by Prophet Zartosht, that he sent his priests and family members with soldiers to neighbouring countries to persuade them to give up their evil ways and revert back to their age old Mazdayasni religion as taught by Prophet Zartosht.

Fire-temples were built everywhere to promote the worship of the good forces in the universe. The first one of such fire-temples was erected on Mount Raevant in Khorasan for the Meher Burzin fire, the spiritual fire brought by Prophet Zartosht himself.

On the gates of this fire-temple an evergreen cypress tree was planted which came to be known as 'Azad-sarva'. Each of the leaf of this tree exhorted the king to accept the Good Religion of Prophet Zartosht. The Prophet started living in this fire temple and so did Lohrasp, the father of king Gushtasp.

The miraculous cypress tree became known all over. As news of this unique tree started spreading, people from all over came to visit it. Coming to this tree became synonymous with accepting the good teachings of Prophet Zartosht, and relinquishing their evil ways and modes of worship.

King Gushtasp built a beautiful palace near this tree. It was constructed with gold, silver and amber. Its outer walls were decorated with figures of former great Iranian kings like Jamshed and Faridun. The inner walls were decorated with precious stones. The palace was barricaded with an iron wall. King Gushtasp became so fond of this palace that he started living in it.

War Between Iran And Turan

Conflict between Gushtasp and Arjasp :

At that time king Gushtasp was paying taxes to Arjasp the king of Turan, Turkestan and China. Prophet Zartosht exhorted the king not to pay taxes to the Turanian king, as he, with his superior Mazdayasni religion was in a much stronger position than the Turanian who was a Daevayasni, that is worshipped the evil powers in nature. Accordingly, the king stopped giving taxes to the Turanian king.

When Arjasp came to know that Gushtasp had stopped paying taxes to him at the behest of Prophet Zartosht, he wrote a letter to the Iranian king asking him to pay the tax or be prepared for a war. He further ordered him not to accept Zartosht as a prophet, but have

him killed. He also exhorted Gustasp to remove the Kushti (the sacred waistband) from his waist, which was given by Prophet Zartosht.

Arjasp threatened Gushtasp that, not only will he lose his favour, but he will also have to face destruction and death at his hands if he did not carry out his bidding within a month. Arjasp dispatched the letter with two of his foremost warriors - Namkhast and Bidarefsh, who were also sorcerers. The duo set forth to Balkh with three hundred soldiers.

When Gushtasp received the letter he was very annoyed at the insult inflicted on Prophet Zartosht. He summoned his minister Jamasp, his brother Zarir, his younger son Aspandiyar and the commanders of his army to discuss the matter with them. All of them resolved that the enemy of their prophet was their own enemy and unanimously agreed to fight Arjasp and punish him for his insolence.

A letter was written, challenging Arjasp to a war and dispatched with his sorcerer warriors. The messengers returned to city of Khallokh and gave the letter to their king.

Preparations for a war :

On receiving the letter, Arjasp commenced preparations for a war. He started gathering his army and instituted worthy commanders like his brothers Kohram and Andirman, the two brothers Gorgsar and Bidarefsh and warriors Khashash, Hushdev and Tabeh.

On the other side, Gushtasp too started gathering troops by contacting his allies, who immediately responded by sending huge armies. Gushtasp selected the best soldiers from amongst them and sent the army towards Turan. He then summoned his pious minister Jamasp, who had the gift of prognosis, and asked him, “O Wise one ! Tell me, what will be the outcome of this war ?”

“O Mighty king,” Jamasp responded in a trembling voice, “I see a very gloomy picture which may severely disturb you. Only if you promise not to hurt me, can I tell you the prognosis.”

The king assured Jamasp that he will not be hurt for no fault of his. On this assurance, Jamasp continued, “O king of the world ! I see that three of your princes, Ardashir, Shidasp and Nivazar will be killed in this war and so will be my own son Gerami and Zarir’s son Nastur. Further on, Zarir himself will be killed by Bidarefsh in a cowardly manner. Aspandiyar will avenge the death of Zarir by killing the culprit, and then he will chase Arjasp out of Iran. Iran will emerge victorious in the end.”

Gushtasp was shocked at the unhappy predictions of the outcome of the war. He decided not to fight the war, or at least not to send his princes and brother to the war. Jamasp consoled his king saying, “O wise king! Who else will go to fight this war ? Nobody in the world can undo the things that are bound to happen.” Gushtasp then decided to go ahead with the war.

The War begins :

King Gushtasp received the news that Arjasp's army had already arrived in Iran, with warriors like Bidarefsh, Namkhast and Kohram. He immediately summoned Zarir and asked him to proceed for the war. Aspandiyar, Shidasp and Nastur were also asked to be ready for the war.

The war began with heavy casualties for Iran. First prince Ardashir and then prince Shirui lost their lives after being hit by arrows. Shidasp fought bravely with Kohram and killed him, but he too was killed shortly after that. Jamasp's son Gerami was first maimed and then killed by Namkhast. Nastur fought bravely and killed many Turanians. Prince Nivzar too fought bravely but was unfortunately killed by a stray arrow. The war went on for two weeks.

Death of Zarir :

Zarir was causing havoc in the battlefield. He fought like a man possessed. None dared to go near him. When Arjasp came to know of this, he exhorted his warriors to fight bravely or else they would have to endure the shame of defeat. He announced that the killer of Zarir would be given not only the hand of his daughter in marriage, but also be made the chief commander of his army and receive lots of wealth.

After a long time, Bidarefsh undertook the challenge. However, it was just the lures of the riches that made him take the risk. He was not brave enough to come face to face with the valiant Zarir, so he went close to him, and contrary to the practice, started shooting spears at him from a hiding place, one of which struck Zarir. He fell from his horse and lost his life.

Gushtasp was heartbroken at the news of his brother's death. When Aspandiyar learnt of the cowardly way in which his uncle was killed he resolved to avenge his death. Gushtasp encouraged Aspandiyar to fight the Turanians, and promised him his throne if the war was won. Aspandiyar went to look for his uncle's killer. He stormed the enemy with renewed vigour, razing many Turanians to dust in the process.

Nastur was worried when he did not locate his father Zarir for a long time. He set out to look for him and was aghast to see his dead body. He went to king Gushtasp and asked him to avenge his brother's death. Gushtasp was moved by the plea of his nephew and decided to go to war, but his advisors cautioned him against taking such a step. Gushtasp then provided the necessary equipment and weapons to Nastur and encouraged him to himself go and avenge his father's death.

Nastur set off to look for his father's killer, slaying many Turanian soldiers on the way. He was riding and fighting exactly like his father. Arjasp was terrified on seeing his zest and energy. He summoned his warriors to fight this determined Iranian warrior. All of a sudden Bidarefsh came out with his poisoned sword which surprised Nastur. He however fought bravely with him. When Aspandiyar came to know that Nastur was in trouble, he rushed to his rescue and killed Bidarefsh after a brief fight. Then Nastur and Aspandiyar triumphantly marched off towards the Iranian camp.

Aspandiyar now changed the strategy of the war. He divided the army into three divisions. One he entrusted to his brother Peshotan, the other to Nastur and the third he retained under himself. His son Nushazar also joined the war and together they pledged to fight their enemy till the end.

Iran emerges victorious :

Arjasp was now with a highly depleted army. He had lost one hundred and thirty thousand soldiers. The Iranians had faced lesser casualties and lost only thirty-one thousand soldiers. When Arjasp came to know that the Iranian army was planning a fresh attack under four able warriors, he was not prepared to face them. He left the camp and fled to his country.

King Gushtasp thus emerged victorious in the war. He led the triumphant Iranian army back to the capital in Balkh. Nastur was given his father's position of Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian army. The king bestowed wealth to his soldiers and provinces to warriors. He then established a fire-temple, called Gushtaspi, had the fire enthroned on a golden fire-vase and appointed Jamasp as its head. When the kings of neighbouring countries like Rome, Barbarestan, Hind and Sind got the news of king Gushtasp's victory, they sent him messages of congratulations along with gifts.

Prince Aspandiyar

A religious mission :

Gushtasp gifted prince Aspandiyar with a crown and treasures and asked him to go into the Iranian empire and convince people about the truth and veracity of the religion of Prophet Zartosht, and exhort them to discard their evil ways and evil forms of worship. Aspandiyar set off on his mission, first towards the north, crossing the river, then to the west in Yemen and Rome and finally to the east towards Hindustan.

All the kings gave up their evil practices, stopped the worship of the black forces and reverted back to their ancestral Mazdayasni religion, as taught by Prophet Zartosht. All of them burnt motifs and idols, established fire temples, accepted the customs and practices of Zoroastrian religion and even requested Aspandiyar to have the Zand-Avesta sent to them. Finally they requested Aspandiyar to appeal the king on their behalf to excuse them from the payment of taxes. The king fulfilled their wishes.

Aspandiyar, thus successfully accomplished his holy mission. Thereafter he relaxed for some time. To his brother Frashivard he gave rich gifts and the province of Khorasan. He then sent a messenger to his father asking him whether there was any other command for him or should he return home.

The King is instigated :

There was a wicked nobleman Gurzam in the court of king Gushtasp. He was very envious of the quick rise and success of young Aspandiyar. In order to harass the young prince, he decided to poison the king's mind against his son.

One day in the court, Gurzam started speaking cryptically to the king, “O great King! Do you know that a bad child is worse than an enemy. Such a child should be discouraged as soon as possible, or one day he is bound to make his parents unhappy. A disobedient child and a disobedient slave, both need to be beheaded, as both are equally dangerous.”

Gushtasp was puzzled at this cryptic talk. “Kindly elucidate as to what you mean to say. Speak clearly and reveal the mystery so that I can understand what you are implying,” he said.

“It is not right to open the mystery before all these people,” the evil Gurzam said. This fanned the curiosity of the anxious king who immediately dismissed the court, and then turning to Gurzam said, “Now be quick and reveal the mystery to me.”

“I am about to reveal something that you will not like to hear,” Gurzam said softly coming close to the king, “But truth is always hard to digest.” Then coming still closer, he continued in a whisper, “Your son Aspandiyar is planning a revolt against you. He has already collected a big army and will attack you anytime now. He plans to imprison you and take over your throne.”

The king was shattered at this news. He not only lost his appetite and sleep, but also lost his zest for life. He was full of revulsion for Aspandiyar and started hating him. The next morning he summoned Jamasp and asked him to write a letter to Aspandiyar commanding him to return immediately for urgent work, on receipt of the letter.

Aspandiyar is imprisoned :

Jamasp accordingly wrote a letter and personally took it to Aspandiyar. He appraised him of the situation back home and advised him to go to his father irrespective of the consequences. Aspandiyar heeded the advise of the wise minister. Out of his four sons, Aspandiyar appointed two - Toos and Nushazar - to look after the fire temples, and of the other two - Mehernosh and Bahman, he appointed Bahman as the commander of the Iranian troops in his absence. Then he immediately set off towards Balkh with Jamasp.

As soon as Aspandiyar reached Balkh, he was arrested on the charge of plotting against and attempting to murder the king. He was secured in heavy chains and imprisoned in a remote fortress on Mount Gumbadan. Aspandiyar was shattered at such behaviour of his father towards a son who was always obedient to him. He bitterly wept at being punished by his father at a stranger’s instigation, even without a fair trial.

After some time the king went to Sistan to persuade Rustam and Zal to induce their subjects to come back into the folds of Mazdayasni religion as taught by Prophet Zartosht. The royal family of Sistan welcomed their king and he stayed with them for two years. However, when they came to know that the king had imprisoned his innocent son Aspandiyar, they were thoroughly disgusted at their king and took back the support extended to him.

When Bahman and other soldiers of Aspandiyar's army came to know about the treatment meted out to their brave father and commander, they immediately set off towards Mount Gumbadan to help and pacify him.

Arjasp takes advantage :

Arjasp was overjoyed with the situation in Iran. The turmoil, infighting, division in the royal family and their allies was the right time for him to strike. The shrewd Turanian king realised that with king Gushtasp himself having gone to Sistan, and the prince being imprisoned, the capital at Balkh was his for the taking. There was no one in the capital except the aged Lohrasp and the priests tending the fire, who, he knew were not capable of defending the capital.

Lohrasp dies a valiant death :

Arjasp sent a spy, by the name Setud, to verify the condition of Iran. Setud confirmed the news that the king had received. After receiving the confirmation, Arjasp alerted his allies and prepared his army for an attack on Balkh. He entrusted his eldest son Kohram the task of spearheading the attack with a hundred thousand strong army. He informed his son that he would shortly join him in Balkh.

Kohram launched an attack on Balkh. The elderly Lohrasp single-handedly and valiantly fought many Turanians, but when the cowardly soldiers, putting aside all norms of warfare, attacked him simultaneously, the aged warrior fell to the ground with God's name on his lips.

Princesses taken captive :

The Turanian soldiers then stormed the palace, burnt the sacred Avesta scriptures, destroyed the holy fire, and killed the priests tending it. Homai and Behafriid, the two daughters of king Gushtasp, were captured and taken prisoners to Turan.

A very intelligent and brave queen of king Gushtasp took it upon herself to go to Sistan and inform the king about the devastation brought on Balkh in his absence by the Turanians. She travelled very swiftly, reached Zabulistan and informed the king about the disasters and tragedies that had befallen his capital and family. Gushtasp was distraught at the news and immediately prepared to go to Balkh. He entrusted sections of the army to Frashivard and Nastur and all of them hastened to Balkh.

When Arjasp came to know that king Gushtasp was coming with his army, he ordered more troops from Turan, and a large number of soldiers descended on Iran.. The two armies fought with each other for three days with heavy casualties on both sides. Princes, Ardashir, Shidasp, Nivazar and Shirui lost their lives in the battle. Prince Frashivard was mortally wounded, but was not prepared to end his life before seeing the face of his brother Aspandiyar. King Gushtasp was shattered at the multiple blows of first losing his father Lohrasp and now several of his sons.

Aspandiyar to be set free :

Respite was nowhere in sight for the Iranian forces. The Turanians, who were on ascendancy, ruthlessly massacred the Iranian soldiers. Gushtasp was no more able to fight in this difficult situation. He fled from the battlefield and took refuge on a mountain, where he summoned his wise minister Jamasp.

“O Wise one! Tell me, what is in store for us? Who will save us from this difficult situation?” the king asked his trusted minister. The experienced Jamasp paused for some time and replied, “I see but one saviour, and he is your son Aspandiyar. Release him from his bondage, for he alone can win this war for us.”

The king was very happy at this answer and told Jamasp, “O righteous one! You have showed me the right path. In anger I had wrongly punished my son. Now you are the only one who could go to him and ask for forgiveness on my behalf. Go to him as soon as you can and request him to help us, or our kingdom will fall in enemy hands.”

Jamasp goes to free Aspandiyar :

Jamasp knew it would be difficult to go to the fort at Mount Gumbadan from amongst the enemy folds and release the prince from bondage. More difficult would be the task to request the prince to come back to help his father, as he was grievously hurt by his father’s thoughtless act.

Jamasp donned the dress of a Turk complete with a Turkish helmet and armour, took a Turkish horse and sped past the enemies casually talking to them in Turkish to avoid any suspicion. As Jamasp was approaching the fort, the soldiers informed Nushazar of an approaching Turk. Nushazar went to see and immediately recognised the rider as Jamasp. He went to his imprisoned father and informed him about the minister’s arrival.

On reaching the fort, Jamasp immediately met Aspandiyar and briefed him about the delicate situation back home. However, Aspandiyar was not willing to forget the injustice and insult meted out to him and did not show any willingness to go and help his father.

Jamasp tried to convince him by saying, “You have to go to avenge the death of your grandfather Lohrasp and the abduction of your sisters.” But Aspandiyar had no regard left for them as they had neither protested his imprisonment, nor had they come to help him.

Jamasp then tried to convince Aspandiyar by trying to touch the moral chord in his conscience. “It is your responsibility towards God, your parents and country that you forget the past differences and go help your father, otherwise you may never see his face again. Think of your brothers who have been killed. You owe it to them to fight back.”

However, Aspandiyar was not impressed by Jamasp’s arguments. He retorted, “Where were all of them when I was imprisoned? Not a single person from my family raised a voice against the injustice meted out to me?”

Disturbed by Aspandiyar’s stubbornness, Jamasp used his trump card. “Wouldn’t you go

for the sake of your beloved brother Frashivard who was the only one who fought for you against Gurzam ? He is now lying on his deathbed with your name on his lips. He will not be able to lay down his life till he sees your face.”

Aspandiyar agrees to go :

Jamasp’s ploy worked. Aspandiyar was moved by his brother’s love for him. Tears started rolling down his cheeks and he became emotional. Then, collecting his senses he said, “You should have told this to me in the first instance. Immediately call the locksmiths and have my chains broken.”

The blacksmiths came with hammers and saws to cut the heavy chains which bound Aspandiyar, but the chains were too strong to be broken by them. Finally, Aspandiyar moved them aside, heaved a deep breath and with a swift jerk himself broke the chains. Everybody, including Jamasp, were amazed on seeing this. Aspandiyar chuckled and explained, “It was not the chains that bound me. I could have broken them long back to free myself. I was bound by my father’s orders, and the admonition of Prophet Zartosht never to disobey my parents.”

Aspandiyar then bathed, dressed, and prepared his armour and weapons. However, before departing, he prayed to God requesting Him to help him fight the war, and forget the injustices done to him by his father. He promised to build a hundred fire-temples and rest houses, plant thousands of trees, dig ten thousand wells, help the poor and needy, guide the people of Mazdayasni Zarthoshti religion, punish sorcerers and devote his time to prayers. Then he set off on his horse with Bahman and Nushazar under the guidance of Jamasp.

Aspandiyar first went to see Frashivard who was mortally wounded and was just waiting to see his face. He was delighted at seeing his beloved brother, but Aspandiyar was pained at the sight of his wounded brother on his death bed, and asked, “Tell me dear brother, who is responsible for doing this to you ?” With great difficulty Frashivard replied, “My beloved brother, Gurzam is at the root of all the tragedy that has befallen our family. Had he not instigated our father, you would not have been imprisoned and Arjasp would not have dared to come to Balkh to desolate it. But the cause of my death, if you must know, is Kohram.” So saying, Frashivard breathed his last.

Aspandiyar tore off his clothes and lamented for his brother. Taking his body to a mountaintop, he exposed it to the elements, and apologised for not being able to construct a Dakhma befitting a prince, as he did not have the means to do so. Nearby he saw the corpse of Gurzam and shuddered at the sight of the person who was responsible for all this tragedy.

Aspandiyar rescues his father :

Aspandiyar then went to the mountain where his father had taken refuge. He fought and killed the Turanians who had laid a siege at the foot of the mountain. Gushtasp was very happy that his son had come back to him. He promised him the crown and the throne once the war was won, but Aspandiyar politely told his father that all he wanted was his

love and happiness.

When Arjasp came to know that Aspandiyar had returned, he was terrified, as he did not see anybody who could withstand the powerful prince. He decided to return to Turan to the safe confines of his fortress at Ruindez, content with the booty that he had collected.

As Arjasp was narrating his plans to his army, a warrior named Kargsar showed willingness to go and fight Aspandiyar. Arjasp was happy at the confidence of this brave man. He promised to make him the chief commander of his army, give him part of Turan and half of Iran if he succeeded against Aspandiyar.

Arjasp flees Iran :

The following day, the armies of Aspandiyar and Arjasp met in the battlefield. Aspandiyar wreaked havoc in the Turanian folds. Arjasp told Kargsar to take on the mighty Aspandiyar. The Turanian warrior cautiously went near Aspandiyar and from a hiding place shot an arrow at him. The savvy Iranian prince realised that he was being shot at from a hiding place and pretended to be wounded, to bring that person out. Sure enough, Kargsar came out of his hiding place and approached Aspandiyar, who swiftly threw a lasso at him and pulled him off his horse. The Turanian warrior was then dragged to the Iranian camp and held a prisoner.

When Arjasp came to know that Kargsar was taken prisoner, he decided to retreat immediately. When Aspandiyar came to know of the Turanian king's intentions, he ordered his soldiers to prevent them from retreating. The king managed to escape, but thousands of his soldiers were massacred. When the soldiers realised that their king had already fled, they asked for amnesty from Aspandiyar, and the noble prince pardoned them and called a stop to the war. Kargsar too was forgiven, and the booty of the war was distributed equally among all.

A new task for Aspandiyar :

When the triumphant Aspandiyar returned to his camp, he expected his father to bestow him the promised crown and throne. However, the king was not yet ready to hand over his kingdom, so he set up a new task for his son.

“Son,” the king said, “Your two sisters have been taken hostage in Turan. What will the world say, if you occupy the throne while your sisters are suffering under an enemy king. It would be in your interest that you first go to Turan, free your sisters and then I promise to hand over the crown, throne and treasures to you.”

Aspandiyar obeyed his father and agreed to go to Turan to free his sisters. He selected an army comprising of twelve thousand cavalry with three thousand camel loads of arms, food and other requirements. His brother Peshotan assisted him with the army. Aspandiyar also took the Turanian warrior Kargsar to guide him to Ruindez, the hideout fort of Arjasp.

'Haft khan' - The Journey Of Seven Stages.

Aspandiyar goes to Turan:

On the way to Ruindez, Aspandiyar and his army halted for rest. There the prince summoned Kargsar and asked him in a stern voice, "O Turanian warrior! Give the right answers to whatever I ask you. If you guide me rightly, I will make you the king of Turan. However, if you mislead me, I will have you cut into two."

Kargsar, being under the obligation of the prince for once forgiving him, meekly replied, "O noble prince! I have no expectations from you, but be assured that I will guide you rightly." Pleased with his attitude, Aspandiyar further inquired, "Tell me, how many routes are there to Ruindez, and how long and difficult is each one of them."

"Master," replied the experienced Kargsar, "There are three routes. One is through rivers and residential areas. It is a safe route and it takes about three months to reach. The second route is a bit difficult, as there are no provisions on the way for food either for the soldiers or for the animals. It takes two months to reach Ruindez through this route.

"The third route is the shortest but the most treacherous, and is known as 'Haft Khan' - The Journey of seven difficult stages. Though there is ample food and hunting game on this route, and it takes just seven days to reach Ruindez, it is full of wild animals, Azdah and sorcerers and has extremely foul weather. The fortress of Ruindez is located immediately at the end of this road."

Describing the fortress, Kargsar further added, "The fortress is huge and impregnable. Its watchtowers reach the sky. It is so well stocked and self sufficient that it can sustain itself without provisions from the outside world even for a hundred years."

The first stage :

Aspandiyar decided to go by the shortest route. He asked Kargsar as to what he should expect on the first stage of the Haft Khan. Kargsar said that he should expect a pair of wolf like creatures, as huge as elephants with horns on their head.

Aspandiyar decided to go alone on the perilous journey and clear the way for others. He instructed Peshotan to follow after some time so that no harm may come to the army, and then proceeded towards the first stage of his perilous route.

Soon enough, a pair of wolf like beasts attacked him. Aspandiyar was prepared for the attack. He wounded them by shooting a torrent of arrows, and then severed their heads with a poisoned sword. He then prayed and thanked God for bestowing him the strength to fight such huge beasts.

Soon thereafter, Peshotan came there with the army. All of them were amazed at the size of the beasts and wondered about the phenomenal strength of their prince. Aspandiyar then asked Kargsar as to what he should expect on the second stage, and was informed

that he would encounter a couple of ferocious lions.

The second stage :

Aspandiyar decided to travel by night to reach the second stage of his journey, so that he could reach his destination by early morning. Once again, entrusting the army to Peshotan, he set off and by early morning reached the place, where he encountered a savage lion. Aspandiyar had no difficulty in finishing off the mammoth beast. Just as he killed the lion, an angry lioness pounced at him, but Aspandiyar dealt a powerful blow with his sword, which cut the lioness into two.

Aspandiyar then washed himself in a nearby stream and thanked God for this second successful day. Peshotan and the army joined him later on. They had their food, and once again Aspandiyar summoned Kargsar and asked him about the upcoming stage of the journey. Kargsar told him that he would have to face a huge ferocious Azdah.

Aspandiyar thought that an Azdah by itself is huge, and a huge Azdah would indeed be difficult for him to handle unless he prepared a proper strategy to kill it. He had a special wooden horse drawn wagon prepared, and encircled it with open poisoned swords. He then had a sturdy wooden trunk made, and kept it inside the wagon.

The third stage :

Early the next morning, Aspandiyar once again entrusted the army to Peshotan and donned his armour. He sat inside the wooden trunk, had it put inside the wagon and the horses were made to set off towards the Azdah's hideout. As they reached the place, the hideous beast heard the rumble of the wagon and came out to ascertain the cause of the sound. On seeing the horse-driven wagon, it took a deep breath and sucked in the horses along with the cart and the wooden trunk.

The poisoned swords surrounding the carriage ripped the throat and the stomach of the Azdah, the poison started having its effect and the Azdah began to struggle for life. Inside the Azdah's stomach, Aspandiyar came out of the trunk, and started chopping it off from inside. He then made his way out by cutting through the Azdah. However, he could not withstand the deadly fumes coming out of the dying Azdah and fell unconscious. Within a few moments, the lifeless Azdah too crashed to the ground with a loud noise.

On hearing the loud noise, and the subsequent silence, Peshotan and the army followed the route, which Aspandiyar had taken. He was concerned on seeing his brother lying on the ground, but was relieved when he saw that he was not hurt, but was just unconscious. He sprinkled rose water over his brother, and Aspandiyar gradually came to his senses. He told his brother and the army that he had fallen unconscious not because of the injury in the fight with the Azdah, but due to the putrid smell emanating from the dying creature.

Aspandiyar then bathed, and prayed to God acknowledging His help. He then called Kargsar and asked him about the following stage of the journey. The Turanian warrior told him that now he will have to encounter a witch by the name Gaul, who had

enormous powers.

The fourth stage :

The group proceeded on the journey in the evening, and by day break reached the beginning of the fourth stage. As per his practice, Aspandiyar asked his army to halt and alone proceeded towards the beautiful garden, which was spread ahead. He had taken with himself a bottle of wine, a goblet and a tambourine.

On the way he came across a stream and sat by it to drink wine. He played on the tambourine and started serenading a song in which he expressed the desire to have a beautiful girl by his side to complete the pleasurable experience amidst the beautiful atmosphere. This was his ploy to entice the witch to come to him.

The witch overheard the song, and approached him assuming the form of a beautiful, slim, lithe and lissome Turkish girl. Aspandiyar thanked God that his plan was succeeding. He asked the girl to come near him and gave her wine in a goblet. As soon as the unsuspecting witch started enjoying the wine, Aspandiyar bound her with a special chain, which Prophet Zartosht had given to king Gushtasp to tie up evil ones.

As soon the chain touched the witch, she assumed her original grotesque form. Aspandiyar immediately swung into action and ended her life with a powerful blow of his sword. As life departed from her body, the whole atmosphere of the place changed drastically. The garden was replaced by desolate landscape, and black clouds loomed large on the sky.

Peshotan and others came rushing at this sudden change of the natural ambience. On seeing the slain hag, they realised the reason for this sudden change and congratulated Aspandiyar. The Iranian prince thanked God for yet another triumph, and then called Kargsar to inquire about the next stage of the journey. He was told that in the coming stage, he will have to encounter a huge and ferocious bird with its two fledglings. The bird was so strong that it could easily lift up a full-grown leopard from the ground.

The fifth stage :

By sunset Aspandiyar proceeded with his group towards the next stage of the journey. At daybreak he separated from the group and went ahead alone, inside the wooden trunk sitting in the same horse drawn wooden wagon, encircled by open poisoned swords and daggers.

When the mighty bird saw the carriage it swooped down in an attempt to lift it up in its talons, but was mortally wounded by the open swords and daggers. It lay bleeding on the ground, and its two young ones flew away seeing the condition of their mother.

The wounded bird tried to attack the wagon again and again, but finally exhausted itself. Aspandiyar then came out of the wooden trunk and finished the bird off with his powerful sword. As per his practice, he prayed to God and thanked Him for his success. Peshotasn and the army caught up with him and congratulated him on yet another success.

After having food, Aspandiyar summoned Kargsar and asked him about the penultimate stage of the journey. The Turanian warrior told him, that now the whole army will have to face difficulties, as they would have to pass through a place where none of his weapons would help him. There were no visible foes over there, but the whole army will have to pass through a snow storm, The snow will be high enough to bury things the height of a spear.

In the final stage they will have to pass through a stretch of barren desert with very high temperatures. After that they would reach Ruindez. The Turanian however cautioned Aspandiyar that it would be suicidal to take his army through the final two stages.

On hearing this, the army was terrified and entreated Aspandiyar to abort his plans of going to Turan. Aspandiyar was annoyed at the lack of bravery of his soldiers. He reprimanded them and challenged their sense of bravery. He exhorted them saying they were brave Iranians, and they should not to be bogged down by difficulties magnified out of proportion by a Turanian enemy. Nevertheless, he gave them a choice either to return or accompany him to Turan, as he had made up his mind to see through his mission till the very end, irrespective of any difficulties that may come in his way.

Aspandiyar's pep talk had the desired effect. Seeing their leader's determination and bravery, the soldiers once again regained their confidence and promised to be with him till their last breath. Then they proceeded towards the next stage of their journey.

The sixth stage :

In the morning, after the army established its base, the sky darkened and a cold blizzard came out, accompanied by strong gusts of wind. It started snowing heavily, and continued for three days and nights. Peshotan realised that they were in a situation where no amount of strength would help, and so he exhorted his soldiers to pray to God, as that was the only source that could help them in such a situation.

All the soldiers started praying together, and continued to do so for a long time. Finally, their prayers were answered. The storm subsided as miraculously as it had begun, and pleasant winds started blowing. All of them thanked God. Aspandiyar exhorted his soldiers to take only the bare minimum of weapons and essential requirements for life, and leave the rest behind. Then, at dusk, they embarked on the last stage of their journey.

The seventh stage :

Aspandiyar and the soldiers walked in expectation of a barren desert in the last stage of their journey. However, when Aspandiyar heard the cries of a heron at a distance, he was surprised by the presence of a heron near a desert, and suspected something to be amiss. He summoned Kargsar, who told him that the birds were in a salt-water pond nearby.

As the army walked further, the night was pierced by a shrill cry, which came from the front of the army. Aspandiyar immediately rushed there and was shocked to see that the camels in front had fully drowned in the sea. He was furious, and was now convinced

that Kargsar had led to him about the final stage of the journey.

He summoned the Turanian and asked him the reason for misleading them. The Turanian confessed that he saw this as his last chance for liberation from the Iranians. Though Aspandiyar was furious at the betrayal, he realised that Kargsar was needed to reach Ruindez, so he forgave him for betrayal, freed him from his bondage and asked him to show them a safe path. Kargsar revealed a hidden pathway in the water, which would lead them to Ruindez.

Aspandiyar reaches Ruindez :

At the end of the underwater path, the Iranian army reached Ruindez. Aspandiyar summoned Kargsar, and told him of his decision to free him for his services, but before that he asked him about his feelings for the Iranians, who had massacred several Turanians in the earlier wars. The Turanian contemptuously replied that he would always hate him for that and always desire his death. Aspandiyar realised that it was not wise to release such a man, as he would always create problems in future. He immediately ended the Kargsar's life with one swift stroke of his sword.

Aspandiyar then went on a hillock to observe the fortress from a distance. The walls of the fortress were so wide, that four horses could easily walk sideways on it. Aspandiyar was demoralised at the sight of this mammoth structure and felt that it was beyond his means to enter it. However, after some deep thought, he hit upon a plan of winning it not by strength but by tact.

A plan to enter the fort :

Aspandiyar drew up an elaborate plan, according to which he would enter the fort as a trader. He called his brother Peshotan, informed him of his plan, and asked him to take his place, and launch an attack on the fort, when he signalled. He would send a smoke signal if it was a day, and fire signal if it was night-time. On receiving the signal, Peshotan should spearhead an attack on the fort.

Aspandiyar then started preparations for his incognito journey. He had gold coins loaded on ten camels, Chinese silk on five, and jewels, a golden throne and a crown on another five. He then had special wooden trunks made, which would fit on either side of a camel. He loaded eighty camels with such trunks and in each trunk he hid two soldiers. He himself donned the dress of a trader and approached the fort with a hundred camels.

Once outside the fort, Aspandiyar displayed his wares and announced very low rates for them. When the warriors and noblemen inside the fort came to know that a trader had set up shop outside the fort, they came in large numbers, and were very happy at the quality of goods and the reasonable prices. However, Aspandiyar told them that he wanted to meet the king and seek his permission before selling them the goods.

Aspandiyar enters Ruindez :

The eager noblemen fixed up an appointment for the trader (Aspandiyar) with king Arjasp, and he was asked to come alone and meet the king inside the fort. Aspandiyar

bestowed precious gifts on the king, introducing himself as Kharrad, a Turkish trader, who traded between Iran, Turan and Turkistan. He requested the king to allow him and his group to come into the fort and sell his goods. The king was very much impressed by the young trader. He not only gave him permission to enter the fort with his group, but also gave them place to stay and set up their wares.

Aspandiyar was very happy at the success of the first leg of his plan. He brought his entire group into the fort and set up his shop with elaborate floral decorations. He then asked the king to send his treasurer, and sent several precious gifts through him. The king was very much pleased with the trader and gave him the right to enter his palace at will without seeking permission. Aspandiyar's business started to thrive and people came to his shop in great numbers.

Aspandiyar meets his sisters :

Aspandiyar's sisters, who were taken captive from Iran, were made to work as water carriers in the palace. When they came to know that a trader had come to the fort, they went to him at night to see if he could help them. They asked Aspandiyar, dressed as the trader, about the well being of their father and brothers in Iran, and entreated him to take a message to them requesting them to come to their rescue.

When the sister's were pouring out their tales of woe, people gathered round to listen to them. Aspandiyar realised the delicacy of the situation, and shooed them away saying he was a trader and not a political ambassador. However, the sisters recognised their brother's voice and even understood his predicament. When everyone went away, Aspandiyar told them softly that he was their brother and had come to rescue them, but they should bide their time.

Last stage of the plan :

Aspandiyar then embarked on the last stage of his plan. He approached king Arjasp and told him, "O magnanimous king ! I want one more favour from you. On my way to your kingdom, I was caught in a storm, and I had promised God that I would give a big feast to rich and poor alike, if I survived. I think, now the time has come to fulfil that promise. So, O great one ! Kindly allow me to hold a feast in your court. I have one more request. Do send all your topmost officials to the feast."

Arjasp, who had by now developed a soft corner for the trader, not only allowed him to hold the feast, but also issued an order to all his top officials to attend the feast and enjoy themselves. Aspandiyar further requested the king to allow him to host the feast on the walls of the fort and let a huge fire be lit up there, as it was winter time. The king granted both the permissions.

On the night of the feast, Aspandiyar made sure that each one of the guards and officials attended it. As the feast progressed, Aspandiyar had lots of wine served to all the guards and officials who were all having a merry time. Most of them were intoxicated and out of their senses. Aspandiyar then had a huge fire lit on the walls of the fort.

Peshotan brings in the army :

The Iranian soldiers outside the fort notice the huge fire and immediately informed Peshotan about it, who was ready and waiting for the signal. As per the plan, he promptly led his soldiers towards the fort.

When Arjasp was informed about an approaching army, he sent his troops under Kohram and Tarkhan even without ascertaining the nationality of the army. A battle ensued, in which Tarkhan was killed by Nushazar. Kohram was terrified by this death, and rushed back to his father informing him about the tragedy.

When the king inquired about the nationality of the army, Kohram told him that the brave commander, who killed Tarkhan, closely resembled Aspandiyar. Arjasp presumed that Aspandiyar might have come to avenge the devastation of Balkh. He sent more troops, and asked them to fight till the finish.

In the fort, Aspandiyar donned his armour and released the soldiers he had smuggled in the wooden boxes, after providing them armour and weapons. He divided them into three groups. One group, he kept with himself, sent the second group to the gate of the fort, and the third group was asked to search and kill the officials who had drunk themselves into stupor.

Arjasp is killed :

Aspandiyar then took his group of soldiers and went to look for Arjasp. He went to the palace and cried out for the king. When his sisters Homai and Behafid heard his voice, they came running to him. He instructed them to wait near the place where he had set up his shop. He then went into the palace and challenged Arjasp for a duel. After a long fight, Aspandiyar succeeded in killing Arjasp. He then set fire to the palace.

The fall of Ruindez :

When the Turanian soldiers heard that their king was killed, they were utterly demoralised. The few brave Iranian soldiers took advantage of the situation and wreaked havoc on them. Most of the armies of Turan and Tartar were ravaged. Not a single notable warrior was left. Andariman and Kohram were caught and hanged at the gates of the fort, and thus the once mighty Ruindez was reduced to shambles.

Aspandiyar relayed the news of his victory to his father through a letter. King Gushtasp was very happy at his son's triumph and immediately sent him a congratulatory reply in which he asked him to return soon to Iran.

Aspandiyar returns to Iran :

Aspandiyar collected all the wealth that he could from Turan, and dispatched it with the army along with his two sisters and three sons through the safer and longer route. He himself decided to return through the Haft Khan. After successfully returning back via the dangerous route, and spent two weeks hunting, by which time his sons and sisters coming through the longer route caught up with him. Then together, all of them returned to Iran.

King Gushtasp had prepared a lavish welcome for his triumphant son. Aspandiyar narrated his adventures of the Haft Khan to his father. The next two days, Aspandiyar spent with his mother Katabun and other queens. Aspandiyar poured out his heart to his mother and told her that his father had promised him the crown and the throne on his return, but had showed no signs of giving it to him as yet. Katabun cautioned her son not to ask his father for it, as it would aggravate him. However, Aspandiyar expressed his desire to confront the king about the promise.

The king somehow got the news that Aspandiyar was anticipating to occupy the throne. He summoned Jamasp and asked him, "O wise seer ! You know the past as well as the future. Please see into my son Aspandiyar's future and tell me what is in store."

The wise minister portended, "O great king, I see a very grim future for the prince. He will be killed at a very young age in Zabulistan at the hands of none other than the great Rustam."

The following day, Aspandiyar came to his father and narrated his achievements in service of the king. He pledged unflinching loyalty to him, and then reminded him of his promise to give him the crown and the throne.

Aspandiyar And Rustam

A new task for Aspandiyar :

"Son," the king addressed solemnly, "There is still one task that you need to accomplish before you occupy the throne. There is only one person left in the world who is not respectful to the king of Iran, and whom I see a threat to the throne. That person is Rustam, the leader of Zabulistan. You should go there and bring him and his sons Faramarz and Zavareh to me as prisoners with their hands and feet bound in chains. Thereafter, without any doubt, I will hand over the crown, throne and treasures to you."

"Father," Aspandiyar tried to reason, "You know Rustam is not an ordinary warrior who will come and offer his respects to you. He is one of our senior-most warriors and a great supporter of the throne. Do you think he will ever revolt against us ? Moreover, Rustam has been given a written Declaration by King Kae Khushru, which makes him an independent ruler of Zabulistan."

The king however sternly told his son, "The Declaration was given a long time ago by a previous king, and it is now null and void. Moreover, if you want the throne, you will have to do as I say and accomplish this mission."

"I know what you want," the infuriated Aspandiyar told the king, "You don't want Rustam as a prisoner, but you want your son dead and out of the way, so that he won't keep you asking for the throne. But, if that is your wish, so be it. Being a dutiful son, I promise you that I will carry out your command, even at the cost of my life. However, remember, dear father, if anything happens to me, you will be responsible for it."

Aspandiyar then stormed out of the court.

Katabun advises Aspandiyar :

When queen Katabun came to know that her son had undertaken the impossible task of imprisoning Rustam, she became concerned about his life. The worried mother rushed to her son in tears and said, “Son, what have you done? Why are you needlessly putting your life in danger? Don’t you know that you are undertaking an unrealisable task? Your father is very old, and the throne will be yours after some time. Then why are you endangering your life for a short period of kingship?”

The already agitated Aspandiyar shot back, “Mother, I know how great Rustam is. Now don’t you shatter my confidence by your words and behaviour. I have considered this as a command from the king and nothing will stop me from undertaking this mission.” Katabun tried hard to dissuade her son, but all her persuasions went in vain.

Aspandiyar sets off for Zabulistan :

Aspandiyar set off for Zabulistan with a small army. While he was camping on the banks of the Hirmand river, he decided to convince Rustam with persuasion by sending a clever emissary to him. His son Bahman volunteered to go as the envoy.

Aspandiyar sent a message to Rustam saying that king Gushtasp was displeased with him. Since the ascension of king Lohrasp to the throne, not even once had he visited them, come to any of their celebrations, or helped them during any of the wars. Hence, the king had ordered to bring him as a prisoner. Aspandiyar requested Rustam to surrender and come with him to Iran as a prisoner, or he will have to use force.

Bahman goes as an envoy :

Bahman dressed in his best clothes, took five escorts and crossed the Hirmand river to go to Zabulistan. News of the arrival of a royal warrior spread fast in the small city of Kabul and reached Zal, who set out to identify the warrior. When the two met face to face, Zal immediately recognised Bahman as a descendant of Lohrasp, but Bahman was not able to recognise Zal, and asked him about Rustam’s whereabouts.

Zal told Bahman that Rustam had gone for hunting, and invited him to come to the palace. Bahman curtly responded that he had not come there to rest or relax. He urgently wanted to convey the message to Rustam and hence requested for a guide to lead him to the hunting grounds.

On being asked his identity, Bahman introduced himself, and then Zal greeted him with great respect and dignity. He gave him a guide who led him to where Rustam was hunting and then from afar showed the place where Rustam could be found with his brother and son. Bahman went to a nearby mountain and saw Rustam roasting and eating an animal which he had hunted. On seeing the gigantic size of Rustam, Bahman was certain that his father would not be able to win a fight with him.

A thought came to Bahman that if he killed Rustam from the vantage point where he was

standing, his father will not have to endanger his life. He rolled a huge boulder to crush Rustam under it. Zavareh, on seeing the boulder shouted and warned Rustam, but the mighty warrior did not move an inch, nor even flinched an eyelid. He went on munching on his food, and when the boulder came near him, casually kicked it away. Bahman was amazed at seeing the fabulous strength of Rustam. He came down from the mountain to give him his father's message.

Rustam turns down the offer :

On seeing Bahman, Rustam immediately recognised him as a member of the royal Kayanan family. When Bahman introduced himself, Rustam was very happy and warmly greeted him with an embrace. Bahman informed him that his father was waiting on the other bank of the Hirmand river and conveyed the message to him.

Rustam was startled on hearing Aspandiyar's message. He thundered, "I have always faithfully served the kings of the past, and never erred against them. Why am I being subjected to such humiliation? Even today I am a devoted servant of the king and am ready and willing to serve him anytime.

"Not only my kingdom and my treasures, but even my life is at his disposal. I am willing to accompany your father to go and meet the king, appease his anger and seek his apology. But I can never undergo the humiliation of fulfilling the strange request of going to Iran as a prisoner."

Rustam then told Bahman to convey this message to Aspandiyar, and come back to him and tell him his final decision. Rustam then sent his brother Zavareh to ask his father to prepare for a warm welcome for Aspandiyar, as he intended to invite the prince, who was also his former pupil, to his humble abode.

When Bahman returned to his father, he recounted his encounter with Rustam, and expressed tremendous awe and admiration for the great warrior. Aspandiyar was infuriated at this idolisation and chastised his son for holding consultations with the enemy, when he was just asked to deliver a message and return.

Aspandiyar meets Rustam :

Aspandiyar then himself proceeded towards Zabulistan. Rustam met him on his way near the Hirmand river, embraced him, and invited him to be his guest for a few days. Aspandiyar flatly refused his offer saying, "The king has instructed me against waiting here for any niceties. Hence I request you to immediately put your legs and hands in chains and accompany me, and I assure you no harm. As soon as we reach there, my father will make me the king, and I will immediately set you free and send you back to Zabulistan with lots of gifts and treasure."

Rustam was greatly hurt on hearing this. He said, "You don't realise how much you have hurt me by declining my invitation, and putting such an offensive proposal. I would rather die than be your prisoner."

“I understand your position,” sympathised Aspandiyar, “But I have to carry out the orders of the king. To convince you of my friendship, I invite you for dinner today, and will send for you at dinnertime.” The two then went their way.

When Aspandiyar returned to his camp, he narrated his meeting with Rustam to his Peshotan, who advised him to accept Rustam’s offer, and not put his life in needless danger by challenging him to fight. Aspandiyar, however had taken his promise to his father very seriously and was in mood to return without fulfilling the promise. He was now in a fix. If he fulfilled his promise, his life may be in danger, and if he did not he feared rebuke not only from his father, but also from the world at large.

A depressed Aspandiyar ate dinner all alone, without sending someone to invite Rustam as per his promise. Rustam waited for a long time for Aspandiyar’s invitation, but when nobody turned up, he finally ate food at his place and then went to reprimand Aspandiyar for not keeping his word.

A verbal duel :

When Rustam met Aspandiyar, he told him in no uncertain terms that he was not happy at Aspandiyar not keeping his word. Aspandiyar apologised to him and gave a lame defense saying that since it had been too late and he was very tired he had not sent for him, but now that he was there he would arrange a feast in his honor.

Likewise, a feast was arranged, and Aspandiyar requested Rustam to come and sit on his left. According to Iranian tradition, however, a senior person is supposed to sit on the right of the host, and Rustam insisted that he be made to sit on the right. This hurt the self-esteem of Bahman who was sitting on the right. Rustam gave him a piece of his mind for not giving respect to his seniors. Aspandiyar intervened at this juncture, gave Rustam his due place and made Bahman sit next to him on a special golden chair.

Aspandiyar then taunted Rustam on his lineage saying, “Isn’t it true that your father Zal was abandoned in the forest by your grandfather, and was brought up on the leftovers of a bird? It is due to the grace of my ancestors that yourself and your father have received an exalted position. It is a shame that now you have become proud and claim superiority.”

Deeply hurt by these terse words, Rustam reprimanded Aspandiyar saying, “How thoughtless of you to speak such words to me, now that you are a crown prince. Have you forgotten how much I have helped the Iranian kings in maintaining their throne and kingdom right from Kae Kobad to Kae Khushru.? It is only because you are so young and inexperienced in the matters of the world, that you talk like this.”

Aspandiyar retorted back, saying, “Do not call me inexperienced. Was it not me who went from place to place to spread the message of Prophet Zartosht? Was it not me who traversed the Haft Khan and single-handedly brought an end to the mighty Turanian king Arjasp and won his impregnable fort of Ruindez?” Thus, both the mighty warriors exchanged their life’s achievements throughout the night amidst glasses of wine.

Rustam tries to befriend Aspandiyar :

Rustam then changed the subject and the tone of his voice and cautioned Aspandiyar against his father. "Son you are too young to know that your father had left no stone unturned in usurping the crown and throne from his father. Now he is in no way going to abdicate in your favour, so he has knowingly pushed you to your death by asking you to bring me as a prisoner, knowing fully well that it may even endanger your life." Rustam then extended a hand of friendship towards Aspandiyar, but the Iranian prince ignored his offer of friendship and instead ordered dinner to be served.

After the sumptuous feast, Rustam once again reiterated his offer of friendship, but Aspandiyar stuck to his proposition of taking Rustam with him as a prisoner, either by persuasion or by force. Aspandiyar misconstrued the attempts of the elderly Rustam as ploys to mislead him to avoid a confrontation.

Rustam was greatly disappointed that his attempts of bringing about a peaceful solution to the problem were being misunderstood as his weakness. Finally, Rustam told Aspandiyar that now the test of his strength would be made in the battlefield the following day. Aspandiyar ridiculed Rustam for his challenge and Rustam went his way swallowing one more insult from Aspandiyar.

That night, Peshotan tried once more to dissuade Aspandiyar. "Brother, I request you for the last time, for God's sake don't undertake this suicidal mission." However, Aspandiyar castigated his brother saying, "You have always been a weak person. Now don't act as a traitor and weaken my resolve too."

Rustam prepares for the duel :

As soon as Rustam reached his palace, he asked his brother Zavareh to prepare his weapons and armour, as they were not used since a long time. The aged father of Rustam was very much worried about his son. He told him, "Son, I see a very dim future for you if you fight against Aspandiyar. Whether you win or lose against him, your life will become miserable. Either accept Aspandiyar's proposition and accompany him as a prisoner, or go in hiding till Aspandiyar forgets his dangerous resolve."

"Father," Rustam said, "I am a warrior. I will either live like a warrior or die as a warrior. I don't want to live a coward's life. Moreover, my attempt during the fight will be to just disarm Aspandiyar, and not hurt him. After I disarm him, I will treat him with great dignity as a honoured guest and win over his love and respect."

Zal scoffed at his son's plans. "Do not underestimate Aspandiyar. It will not be easy to disarm him and he won't succumb to your gentle persuasions. All I can do now is pray for your success and happiness." So saying Zal went away for his prayers.

Duel between Aspandiyar and Rustam :

The next day Rustam donned his armour, draped his famed tiger skin and went astride his horse Rakhsh to meet Aspandiyar in a duel. He took his brother Zavareh and a small army with him just in case Aspandiyar insisted on a war instead of a duel. He asked

Zavareh to wait on the banks of Hirmand river and told him that he would summon him if need arose. Then he crossed the river and went towards Aspandiyar's camp.

On the other side Aspandiyar too wanted a duel, but he too kept an army ready under Peshotan just in case Rustam insisted on a war. When Rustam came alone and challenged him for a duel, he asked Peshotan to stay back and went alone for the duel.

Aspandiyar was once again persuaded by Rustam to change his mind, but he termed this request as a deceitful ploy of an aged warrior and challenged him to fight. Both the warriors agreed to fight alone and started fighting with spears till their spears broke. Then they started fighting with swords. They were injured and exhausted, but continued to fight for long time.

Such was the intensity of the two warriors, that their swords too broke into pieces. They then started fighting with the mace, but the mace too could not sustain for long and hence the two warriors pulled each other off the saddle and engaged in hand to hand combat. At the end of the day, none proved to be superior to the other, and so, as per the rules of combat both retreated to their respective camps - their armours tattered, their bodies bleeding and their horses tired and frothing.

War between the two camps :

Rustam's camp had expected him to return soon. When he did not come for a long time, Zavareh took his army and went to inquire in Aspandiyar's camp. There he met Nushazar and the two entered into a heated argument resulting in a war between the two camps.

In this war Nushazar killed a Kabuli warrior Alwa, and in retaliation, Zavareh killed Nushazar. When Aspandiyar's other son Mehernush came to know about his brother's death, he went to avenge it. Faramarz saw him rushing with an open sword and tried to intercept him, and in the duel that followed, the inexperienced Mehernush too was killed when he inadvertently injured his horse with his own sword while fighting.

When Aspandiyar's other son, Bahman came to know about the death of his two brothers, he conveyed this news to his father. Aspandiyar, who was returning from the duel at the end of the day was shattered at this news. He accused Rustam, had not gone far, of breaking his promise and involving armies in the war.

"I am not aware of what has happened," confessed a bewildered Rustam. "I assure you that I have not given the orders for a war. As proof of my sincerity, I promise that I will hand over the culprits, may it be my brother Zavareh or my son Faramroz, to you and you could put them to death."

Aspandiyar realised that Rustam was not at fault. His anger cooled down and he said, "I don't believe in avenging death by death. If I am able to succeed over you, the death of my two sons will be vindicated."

Rustam flees from Aspandiyar :

The next day Rustam met Aspandiyar in duel again. Aspandiyar fought with the same strength and energy as he had fought the previous day, whereas Rustam was feeling weak and exhausted. Rustam and his horse Rakhsh were badly injured in the duel, whereas there was not even a scratch on Aspandiyar's body. This made the great Kabuli warrior exclaim in frustration, "Is this man made of brass? Is he Ruintan (One whose body is as strong and resistant as brass)?"

Rustam started trembling due to weakness and exhaustion. For the first time in his life he felt ineffective and helpless. He got down from his injured horse, and like a feeble man fled atop a nearby mountain. Aspandiyar laughed at seeing the plight of the world's greatest warrior and ridiculed him.

When Rakhsh reached home alone, Zavareh was very concerned. He went to look for Rustam and was grieved at the sight of his mighty brother lying wounded on the ground writhing in pain. Rustam asked him to go back to their father and ask him to look for instant healing for his wounds. He also told his brother to have the wounds of his horse healed too, since if he survived the wounds and got a second lease of life, he will still be ineffective without his favourite Rakhsh. Zavareh left immediately to carry out his brother's command, and Rustam crossed the Hirmand river with great difficulty and went home.

Aspandiyar's grief knew no bounds when he returned home and saw the corpses of his two young sons. He sent the dead bodies to his father Gushtasp with a message stating that he was responsible for their death, as he had mislead his son and sent him to unnecessarily imprison one of the most powerful man in the world. He further stated that the fight was still on, and God alone knew how many more casualties were in store for them.

Aspandiyar then told his brother Peshotan that Rustam had fled the battlefield after being severely injured. He further confided to his brother that seeing the way Rustam was injured, his body full of arrows, he did not expect him to live long.

Zal seeks Simurgh's help :

When Rustam went back to his palace, his family grieved at seeing his condition. Rustam told his father not to grieve over his injuries, but to find a way to fight the invincible Aspandiyar. Rustam was surprised as to why his powerful arrows and swords, which even pierced iron, were not able to make an impact on Aspandiyar. He said that often he was saved from certain death at the hands of Aspandiyar due to the onset of dusk, and was afraid to face Aspandiyar in the morning.

Zal then decided to call upon Simurgh for help. Simurgh was the saintly man who could assume the form of a bird at will and who had nursed Zal during his infancy and looked after him till his youth. Simurgh had given him feathers and asked him to burn them and summon him whenever he needed his help. Zal took three helpers, a receptacle for making fire and went atop a mountain.

He made a fire in the receptacle, and burnt on it a feather, brought out from silk wrappings. After some time, the bird Simurgh appeared in the sky and asked Zal why he had remembered him. Zal narrated Rustam's problems to Simurgh, who asked Zal to call Rustam and Rakhsh over there. Zal sent a warrior to summon them, and within no time, both of them came to the mountain.

Simurgh gently pulled out with his beak, tips of eight arrowheads embedded in Rustam's body, caressed him with his feathers, and Rustam became as healthy as before. He then gave a feather to Rustam and asked him to immerse it in milk and apply it all over his wounds. He further instructed him to abstain from fighting for seven days. Simurgh similarly healed Rakhsh by removing tips of arrowheads embedded near his mane, and the horse too became healthy and strong once again.

Simurgh then revealed to Rustam that Aspandiyar was blessed with a special blessing by Prophet Zarathosht whereby an invisible armour constantly protects him, and no weapon could harm him. True enough, his body is as strong as brass, and hence he is known as Ruintan. Moreover, he also possessed divine glory. Hence, the person who killed him would be miserable in life as well as after death. Rustam told Simurgh that he would prefer that misery to the shame of being imprisoned by Aspandiyar, and so Simurgh assured him of his help in defeating Aspandiyar.

Simurgh took Rustam to the Chinese sea, near which grew a poisonous tree by the name 'Gaz' (perhaps Tamarisk) in a forest. Simurgh instructed Rustam to make a forked arrow from a branch of that tree and shoot Aspandiyar in the eyes, as his eyes were the only part of his body susceptible to injury. This would certainly bring about his death, and was the only way of overpowering him.

Before returning, Simurgh once again exhorted Rustam to try and strike a compromise with Aspandiyar, and only if he insisted for a fight should he use the special arrow. Then, after meeting Zal, Simurgh returned back as suddenly as he had appeared.

Rustam's last attempt to dissuade Aspandiyar :

After taking the prescribed rest, a rejuvenated Rustam once again went to Aspandiyar's camp and challenged him. Aspandiyar was surprised at such a quick recovery of the horse as well as Rustam and surmised that his father Zal may have resorted to magic to restore them back to health.

Aspandiyar donned his armour, came out and told Rustam what he thought about his recovery. Without responding to his remarks, Rustam once again offered a compromise and extended his hand in friendship, fervently requesting the young prince to forget their enmity. He even showed readiness to surrender all his treasures to him, and accompany him to the king. He assured Aspandiyar, that after he convinced the king of his innocence, he was ready to accept any verdict of the king, whether it is imprisonment or even death. Rustam tried to convince Aspandiyar that by making peace he would be bringing luck and fame in his favour.

However, Aspandiyar rejected all of Rustam's efforts of reconciliation, terming them as attempts of a weak, old man to win over a strong young man. He was adamant on his demand of having Rustam chained and imprisoned. Rustam was not ready for this, but he once again reiterated his previous offer of friendship, saying he was ready to accede to any of his request except being bound by chains. Aspandiyar was however adamant on carrying out his father's orders to the hilt.

Rustam then asked Aspandiyar to call his brother Peshotan as a witness to the fact that it was Aspandiyar and not Rustam who wanted a duel, since if any harm came to the prince he did not want to be blamed for it throughout his life. Peshotan was summoned as a witness to Rustam's offers for peace.

Death of Aspandiyar :

Aspandiyar was now getting impatient at what he thought to be Rustam's delaying tactics. He curtly told Rustam not to waste any further time and challenged him to a duel. Rustam was very reluctant to employ his last weapon which would definitely bring about the death of Aspandiyar, but he did not have any other option. He placed the forked arrow from the Gaz tree on his bow and prayed to God to forgive him or taking this step in desperation.

Noticing the pause in Rustam's action, Aspandiyar shot an arrow at Rustam, who retaliated by shooting the forked arrow into Aspandiyar's eyes. As soon as the arrow pierced the prince's eyes, he fell down from his horse, writhing in pain. He pulled out the arrow from his eyes, but knew that his end was near. The powerful Rustam too was very much pained at what had happened.

As soon as Peshotan and Bahman saw this, they rushed near him. Aspandiyar realised his mistake in challenging the mighty Rustam. He requested Rustam to come near him and said in a faltering voice, "Do not grieve O mighty Rustam! For I do not hold you, but my father responsible for my predicament. However, I have but a last wish to make. Take my son Bahman with you to Zabulistan and keep him under your tutelage."

"Your wish is my command," Rustam assured Aspandiyar. "I will be Bahman's teacher and guide as long as I live."

Aspandiyar, was very angry at his father Gushtasp. He summoned Peshotan and told him to convey this message to him. "Father, you should be a happy man now, for your wish of seeing me dead has been fulfilled. Now you can enjoy your reign for as long as you wish. I will wait for the day when you join me in the other world, and we both stand before God for his judgement.

Aspandiyar then sent this touching message to his mother Katabun. "Mother, I will miss you as much as you will miss me, but do not grieve for me. Do not see my face when my body reaches you, for it will only increase your grief." Aspandiyar's body became limp and lifeless after uttering these words.

Rustam's family members too rushed to the site when they heard about Aspandiyar's fatal injury. All of them grieved at the death of the young prince. Zal, in particular, was very much concerned for his son, as seers had portended a miserable and painful death for the person who killed Aspandiyar. Zavareh rebuked Rustam for agreeing to look after Bahman. He feared that it may bring ruin and devastation to Zabulistan in future, as Bahman may avenge his father's death. Rustam however pacified him and told him not to worry, and leave the future in God's hands.

Aspandiyar's body is taken to Balkh :

The dead body of Aspandiyar was draped in royal clothes, put in an iron coffin and escorted by Peshotan to Balkh. A pall of gloom surrounded Balkh when Aspandiyar's body reached there. Gustap too grieved the death of his son, but his noblemen did not support him in his hour of grief, as all of them blamed him for the death and walked out of the palace.

Aspandiyar's mother Katabun, his queens and sisters too were shattered at this sudden blow. They lamented the death of the young prince and prayed to the divinity Sarosh to look after his soul.

When Peshotan went to the court, he did not greet the king with the customary bow. He accused him of bringing about the downfall of the Iranian empire due to his love for the throne. He also held the minister Jamasp partly responsible for Aspandiyar's death, as he had predicted the death at the hands of Rustam and yet not stopped the king from issuing the suicidal order to his son. Peshotan then repeated aloud the last words of Aspandiyar before the court.

Aspandiyar's sisters Behafrid and Homai too accused their father for causing the death of his brave, loyal and dutiful son. The entire nation mourned the death of their young prince for one full year.

Letter about Bahman :

In the meantime, Bahman, who had stayed back in Zabulistan, was occupied in hunting and enjoyed his time. Rustam took great care of Bahman, treated him like a son and gave him all the necessary education.

After Bahman's education was completed, Rustam wrote a letter to Gushtasp in which he pleaded his innocence and pledged his loyalty to the king. He explained that he had tried his best to avert the tragedy, but Aspandiyar was bent upon having the fight to humiliate him. He then told the king that to atone for whatever that had happened, he had taken great pains in giving a proper education to Bahman, and now his education was complete.

On receiving the letter, Gushtasp had it read out in his court. Peshotan vouched for the veracity of Rustam's words. Gushtasp replied to Rustam saying he had forgiven and forgotten everything. Moreover, he wrote that, like his predecessors, he held Rustam in

great esteem. Rustam was very happy on receiving this letter.

Bahman is called to Balkh :

Jamasp suggested to the king that Bahman should be called back to Balkh, as he was the rightful heir to the throne. Accordingly king Gushtasp sent two letters - one to Bahman asking him to come back to his ancestral palace, and the other to Rustam, requesting him to send back Bahman.

When Rustam received the letters, he was glad that Bahman was accepted as the successor by the king. He made preparations to send Bahman, and gave him a lot of gifts, jewels, weapons and armours and went halfway to see him off.

The king himself went to receive Bahman when he reached Balkh. He became very emotional on seeing his grandson, as he closely resembled his son Aspandiyar. The king gave him the crown name Ardeshir. Bahman was given the nickname Darazdast, as his hands (dast) were so long (daraz) that they reached beyond his knees.

Death of King Gushtasp :

The king spent a lot of time with his grandson and indulged him in royal pleasures like hunting and polo. After ruling for one hundred and twenty years, he entrusted the throne to Bahman, asking his minister Jamasp and son Peshotan to help and guide him. Shortly thereafter, Gushtasp passed away and was placed in a Dakhma specially made for him.

Death of Rustam and Zavareh :

Shortly thereafter, Rustam too became a victim of a plot hatched by his own half-brother Shagad and the king of Kabul. He fell in a pit full of weapons prepared for his death, and both he and his faithful horse Raksh met a tragic end. However, before dying, he pierced the heart of the treacherous Shagad by a masterful arrow shot through a Chinar tree behind which the cowardly Shagad was hiding. Rustam's brother Zavareh too became a victim of the traps dug by his half-brother, and lost his life by falling in one of the pits.

6. KING BAHMAN

Bahman seeks revenge :

Bahman was a religious king. He started his reign in a very benevolent manner and did a lot of charity. However, one day he thought of avenging the premature death of his father Aspandiyar and brothers Nushazar and Mehernush, since there was a tradition in Iran to avenge wrongful deaths. He consulted his advisors, and they too supported him. Hence Bahman prepared an army of a hundred thousand soldiers and set off for Sistan.

When Bahman reached the Hirmand river, he sent a messenger to Zal informing him that he was coming to seek revenge for the death of his father and brothers.

The aged Zal became very pensive on receiving this message. He wrote back a letter trying to reason with Bahman that the death of his father was not Rustam's fault, as he had tried his best to avert it. Zal also reminded Bahman that it was Rustam who had nurtured him with care and taught him the arts and crafts of warfare.

Now that Rustam too was not there anymore, the question of avenging the deaths did not arise at all. Zal apologised to Bahman on behalf of his late son Rustam, and requested him not to attack them considering their faithful services to Iran. He even showed readiness to give away all his treasures to him, as he respected him as his overlord king.

Zal then sent back the emissary with various gifts to Bahman. When Bahman received Zal's letter, he laughed it off and marched towards Zabul, with revenge seething in his head.

Bahman ravages Zabul :

When Zal came to know that Bahman was marching towards Zabul, he went on foot to receive him. Once again he requested Bahman to forget the enmity and forgive them, considering that he was nurtured by this very same family. But Bahman became all the more infuriated and had him chained. He then looted the palaces, loaded the treasures on camels and sent them to Iran.

In Zal's palace, the atmosphere was one of mourning. The anguished queens, especially Rodabeh, were feeling the absence of Rustam more than ever.

Faramarz is killed :

Rustam's son Faramarz was in the city of Bust at that time. When he came to know about the attack on his grandfather, he went to help him. When Bahman got the news of Faramarz's arrival, he prepared an army to fight him.

For three days and nights the small army of Faramarz fought bravely with the mighty Iranian army. On the fourth day, misfortune struck the army as a sandstorm blowing in their direction blinded them. Most of the soldiers deserted the army. Faramarz was captured by Ardashir and brought to Bahman, who cruelly ordered him to be hanged by the neck. Thus the life of one more valiant Zabuli warrior came to a tragic end.

Bahman retracts :

The wise and aged Peshotan was Bahman's minister. He was very much pained at the turn of events and admonished the king, who was also his nephew, against his revengeful course of action. He told him that he owed his throne to Rustam and in no way was the pillage, massacre and imprisonment of Zal justified. The services of the Zabuli family to the Kayanian kings were unprecedented in history.

The wise words of wisdom had the desired effect on Bahman. He calmed down, and his anger and revenge subsided. He realised his mistake, immediately ordered the pillage to be stopped and set Zal free. He also had the bodies of the dead soldiers consigned respectfully to the Dakhma. He retracted the army from Kabul and went back to Iran.

After returning to Iran, Bahman once again occupied himself with the administration of his country. However, he had lost the support and goodwill of his subjects. Even his relationship with his son Sasan was strained.

There was a maid by the name Homai in Bahman's palace. On account of her good looks, she was also known as Cheherazad, which means born beautiful. The king took fancy for her and married her.

Death of Bahman :

When Homai was six months pregnant, Bahman suddenly took ill and realised that his end was near. He was worried about the future of Homai who was not well accepted by his family and the noblemen. So he sent for his courtiers and noblemen and declared that after him, Homai will act as the caretaker of the empire till a child, either a son or a daughter, was born to her. The child should be then entrusted the crown and throne of Iran. Shortly thereafter Bahman passed away.

Sasan leaves the palace :

Sasan, the king's son, was very much hurt by the strange dying declaration of his father. He left the royal palace and stayed in hiding in the city of Nishapur where he married a poor lady of a noble family. Sasan lived in great poverty and never revealed his identity or royal lineage. A son was born to him who too was named Sasan. Shortly thereafter Sasan, the father, died.

The child Sasan grew up and took up a job as a cowherd at the house of the chief of Nishapur. His descendant would establish the last of Iran's Zarthoshti dynasty - The Sasanian dynasty.

7. QUEEN HOMAI

Homai occupied the throne after the death of Bahman. She proved to be a wise and just ruler. During her reign, Iran progressed greatly and she took her country to new heights of prosperity.

Power corrupts Homai :

However, once Homai got the taste of power, she did not like to relinquish it in favour of the child. So when a child was born, she declared to the people that it had died at birth. The fact was, Homai had given birth to a healthy baby boy and taking a wet nurse in confidence, entrusted him in her care.

Homai abandons her child :

The nurse lovingly cared for the child till it was eight months old. Then Homai ordered that the child be kept in a wooden basket and abandoned in the Euphrates river.

Accordingly a wooden basket was made. It was lined with a soft silken bedding and filled with jewels and gold. A royal jewel was tied to the child's arm and it was placed in the basket, which was then sealed and left in the river at midnight. Two soldiers were entrusted the task to follow the basket, ascertain the fate of the child and report back to the queen.

A washerman finds the child :

The basket lazily floated down the river and by dawn rested besides a stone, near which a washerman by the name Behram was working. He saw the basket, went near it and opened it. His joy knew no bounds when he saw a child wrapped up amidst jewels and gold in the basket. He hurriedly rushed home to his wife Zohra who had recently given birth to a still born child.

When the washerman broke the news to his wife, she too was very happy at receiving this unusual gift from God. She rushed to the spot with her husband, hastily opened the basket and picked up the crying child. Her maternal instincts told her that the child was crying due to hunger, so she immediately started feeding it. On account of the rich clothes and jewels, the couple assumed the child to be from a royal family.

Meanwhile, the two soldiers who were following the basket on its course in the river noticed the child being adopted by the washerman and his wife. They went back to the queen and reported all that they had seen. The queen told them to keep this secret to themselves, and threatened them of dire consequences if they ever revealed it.

The child is named Darab :

When the washerman and his wife did not hear any reports of a lost child for three days after finding the child, they decided to bring it up as their own. They named the child Darab, which means “found from the water”. The couple then decided to relocate their house afar, so that nobody would recognise them and they would be able to utilise the rich jewels and gold found in the basket to live a life of luxury.

They went far away from their old house and bought a new spacious house, clothes and other items of luxury. They spent their wealth so lavishly that within a short time they had nothing left with them. Hence, they once again reverted back to their old profession of washing clothes.

Darab grows up :

Darab grew up to be a strong and powerful boy and started showing signs of royalty. He used to fight with and dominate all the boys in the neighbourhood. His parents were always worried about his reckless pranks, so one day they decided to initiate him into their profession.

However, Darab, who had royal martial blood flowing in his veins flatly refused to learn the washerman’s trade and instead requested his father to send him to learn Zand-Avesta - the Zoroastrian religious scriptures along with their understanding. The washerman agreed to Darab’s request and he was sent to a priest, under whom he completed his learning. Thereafter he requested his father to allow him to learn riding, and within a short time became an accomplished horseman, adept in the royal arts of archery, spear-fighting, defense techniques, polo and equestrian sports.

Darab finds out his ancestry :

One day, Darab went to his father's workplace and said, "Father, what I say may hurt you, but I have to admit that I don't have any genuine feelings of love or attachment towards you. Moreover, there is no resemblance whatsoever in our looks or our way of thinking. Even when you address me as a son, the word sounds hollow."

On hearing these words, the washerman, who had taken great pains in bringing up Darab, was very much grieved. He heaved a sigh and said, "Alas! All the trouble taken in your upkeep seems to have gone in vain. Unfortunately, you are right. I am not your real father, but I am not going to reveal your true identity, which only myself and your mother know. If you think yourself capable, go and find your true identity yourself."

Darab was all fired up by his father's reply. He rushed to his house, where his mother was all alone. He pulled out his sword and threatened her saying, "If you value your life, reveal my true identity, and tell me how I have landed up staying with you."

Fearing her life, the washerman's wife requested him not to harm her and then narrated the story of how they had found him. She added, "We were not wealthy people, but it was with the jewels and the gold in your basket that we bought ourselves this huge house and other luxuries. We owe everything to you."

Darab was shocked and surprised when he came to know the truth. He asked for some money so that he could buy himself a horse, a saddle and some weapons. The washerman's wife gave him some money along with the jewel that was tied to his arm. With this, Darab bought his requirements. He then enlisted himself in service of the local chieftain and bided his time before he could get an opportunity to prove his mettle.

Darab enlists in the army :

Soon thereafter, Darab got the opportunity he was waiting for. The queen got the news that the Romans were to attack Iran. She instructed her commander Rashnavad to enlist new soldiers in the army. When the commander started recruiting soldiers, Darab took the opportunity and enlisted himself in the army.

The commander prepared the new soldiers for inspection by the queen. Darab too was among the newly recruited soldiers. The queen rode past the soldiers one after another. As soon as she came near Darab, she was struck by his royal features, strong built and stately looks. On seeing him, the queen's maternal instincts were aroused. She handpicked him and gave him a high position in the army, which was then given orders to proceed to Rome.

Darab's miracle :

When the army was on its way to Rome, a terrible storm broke out and the soldiers were taken by surprise. They ran helter and skelter to take refuge. Darab took refuge under a stone doorframe in the desolate ruins of a house and went to sleep amidst the rumble of thunder showers.

After the storm subsided, the Iranian commander Rashnavad went to inspect the damage to his army. As he came near the ruined house, he heard a divine voice addressing the door frame, “O feeble door frame! Take care of the Iranian monarch who sleeps under you.” Rashnavad was surprised at this voice, but dismissed it as a hallucination caused by the sound of wind. However, after some time, he again heard the voice, “Don’t give way, O door frame! For the late king Bahman’s son is sleeping under you. Take care, and do not shatter under the force of rain and thunder.” Rashnavad tried hard to locate the source of the voice, and once, again for the third time heard it exhorting the doorframe.

The commander was now certain, that someone special was sleeping under the crumbling doorframe. He sent his trusted men to look into the ruined house. They saw Darab sleeping there with his horse and reported it to their commander, who ordered them to wake him and ask him to report to him. The commander’s men woke up Darab and asked him to come with them. As soon as Darab stepped out of the doorframe, it gave way and crashed on the ground with a huge bang. If it had happened seconds earlier, Darab would have been crushed to death.

When Rashnavad came to know about this, he was convinced that he had witnessed an unprecedented miracle. He gave Darab special treatment, ordered new clothes for him, gave him an Arabian horse, a golden sword with a matching shield and had a special tent made for him.

The commander then asked Darab his ancestry. He narrated to him whatever he knew of his life, and showed him the jewel tied to his arm when he was found in the basket. Rashnavad immediately dispatched his men to summon the washerman and his wife.

Darab becomes a hero :

Rashnavad now entrusted a large part of the army to Darab, and they marched towards Rome. They met the Roman army on the way and gave them a bold fight. Darab fought very bravely and slashed through their army. His prowess was greatly appreciated by Rashnavad who promised to reward his efforts once they reached Iran.

The next day Darab once again launched an attack on the Roman army and wrought havoc. Most of their treasures were captured and distributed among the soldiers. Darab only took a small part of the treasure as a remembrance of his victory. Rashnavad was greatly impressed by the prowess and nobility of Darab.

The following day, the soldiers attacked the Roman army with renewed vigour. The Kaiser of Rome sent an emissary with gifts requesting a truce. Rashnavad accepted the offer, and shortly thereafter the Iranian army embarked on its return journey to Iran.

On the way back, they halted near the ruined house where the miracle of the door frame had taken place. There they met the washerman and his wife who were on their way to meet the commander. They were afraid that they may be penalised for using up the jewels in the basket.

Rashnavad met them and told them not be afraid. He then asked them about Darab. The couple recounted the incidents right from the day they had found Darab in a basket in the river. Once again Rashnavad was amazed at the strange turn of events. He thanked the washerman and his wife for their help, wished them well and sent them off after giving them gifts.

The Queen finds her lost son :

The next day Rashnavad sent a letter to Queen Homai informing her in detail about Darab, his bravery, the unusual happenings involving him, and the story of the washerman. Along with the letter, he also sent the jewel tied on infant Darab's arm.

When the queen received the letter and the jewel, she was very happy that she had found the son whom she had forsaken in a fit of selfishness. She now realised why she had felt the sudden rush of maternal instincts on seeing Darab during their first meeting at the inspection of new recruits. To celebrate the joyous occasion, she did much charity and gave away a lot of wealth to religious institutions. She then sent a message back to Rashnavad, instructing him to get Darab along with him to the palace.

The queen made elaborate preparations to receive her long lost son. She also kept royal robes and jewels ready for him, and after they arrived from the battlefield, she admitted Darab into the palace on an auspicious day.

Darab and Homai met each other as mother and son for the first time. "Dear son," apologised the sobbing mother, "Please forgive me for the crime of passion I had committed in my youth on account of greed and inexperience. Think not of the crime, but the circumstances under which I committed it."

The magnanimous Darab forgave his mother and said, "Mother, you are from a royal family after all, and royalty are prone to crimes of passion due to their impulsive nature. I fully understand your position at that time and unconditionally forgive your mistake. There is no need to grieve about it, now that providence has brought us together." Then on a humorous touch he added, "Were it not for being forsaken, so many miracles would not have happened to me. Now at least, I will be forever remembered for the miraculous happenings in my life."

The queen was very happy at the large hearted pardon of her son. She had ruled for thirty-two years, and now she decided to abdicate in favour of her son. Through her advisor and head priest, she invited the noblemen of Iran, and confessed before them her crime of passion. She then requested them to accept Darab as her successor.

The noblemen were enthralled when they learnt that a royal heir to the throne was found. They unanimously accepted Darab as their king. When this news reached the people of Iran, the entire nation was jubilant.

8. KING DARAB

Darab proves to be a good king :

Darab was unanimously accepted as the king of Iran. The coronation took place with great pomp, splendor and grandeur amidst nationwide celebrations. Representatives of kings and people from Hindustan, Rome and many other places came to congratulate him and pledge their allegiance.

Soon after assuming the throne, the first task that Darab undertook was to summon his caretaker parents, Behram the washerman and his good wife Zohra. When they came, he welcomed them with respect and affection and bestowed gifts and jewels on them. He bade them farewell on a humorous note saying, "Dear father, do not leave your old job as a washerman, for who knows, you may find another basket in the water wherein you may find another Darab."

Darab then called a meeting of the priests, chieftains, warriors and noblemen and said, "Wise men, as you all are aware, I have not made any exertions to get this throne. I feel God has bestowed it on me. I don't think anybody else in the world has become a king in such extraordinary circumstances. Hence, the least I can do to thank Him, is to rule the kingdom justly, make my subjects happy and the country prosperous."

Once, while inspecting his kingdom, Darab came across a beautiful lake. He had canals dug from the lake, beautified the place around it, and established a city there, which he called Darabgard. He had fire temples established there, and invited people of various professions to come and inhabit the beautiful city.

Battle with the Arabs :

Just when things were peaceful in Iran, an army of a hundred thousand soldiers came from Arbastan under Shoib-bin-Katib. Darab mobilised an army and bravely fought against them. The battle lasted for three days and nights.

On the fourth day, the Arab commander Shoib was killed, after which the Arabs soldiers fled leaving behind their horses, spears, armours and helmets. Darab confiscated these and had them distributed amongst his soldiers. He then sent a chieftain to Arbastan to demand taxes for the current and the previous years from the Arab overlord.

War with Rome :

King Darab came to know that some of the fleeing Arab soldiers were given refuge in Rome by its ruler Philkus, who was an ally of the Russian king. Darab sent a message to Philkus asking him not to harbour his enemies or he may be attacked. Philkus did not surrender the Arab soldiers, but started preparing an army in Ammuria to counter the Iranian attack.

When Darab came to know of Philkus' defiance, he launched an attack on Rome. The war went on for three days. Philkus realised that his Roman army was no match for the

mighty Iranian army, and so he sent an ambassador requesting a truce.

Truce at a price :

The Iranian king convened a meeting of wise men to decide the course of the war. He was advised to ask for the hand of Nahid, the Roman Kaisar's daughter and annual taxes of one hundred thousand good quality pearls and a similar number of golden eggs of a certain weight, for ending the war. Darab accordingly informed Philkus the terms for peace and the Roman king readily agreed to them. The tax was sent along with Princess Nahid to king Darab, who then left for Iran along with his retinue.

Princess Nahid is sent back :

Darab started spending time with his new queen Nahid. One night, a horrible stench started emanating from Nahid's mouth, which the king was not able to bear. Next day the king summoned some experienced doctors who diagnosed her problem after great difficulty. They applied a herb by the name 'Eskandar' to the princess' palate and after some time she recovered from her ailment.

However, now Darab did not like to keep Nahid with him any longer, and sent her back to Rome. He was, not aware that Nahid was already pregnant with his child. The Roman Kaisar felt very offended by this gesture of the Iranian king.

Birth of Eskandar :

In due course, Nahid gave birth to a child. The colour of the child's skin, resembled that of the herb 'Eskandar' which had cured the princess of her terrible ailment, and hence the child too was named Eskandar.

The Kaisar raised up his grandchild as his own. The child grew up to be an accomplished warrior and a worthy heir to the Roman throne.

After sending Nahid back to Rome, king Darab married again and had a son by the name Dara. When Dara was twelve years old, king Darab left for his heavenly abode. In his dying declaration, he declared Dara as his successor and instructed the noblemen to take orders from him and keep him happy.

9. KING DARA

According to the wishes of Darab, his son Dara was coronated the king. Dara was a short tempered and arrogant king and had a very sharp and piercing tongue. He instructed his noblemen and subjects that he will deal firmly with all those who dared to break any laws. Those who disobeyed him would have to face the death penalty.

King Dara sent letters to all kings under him instructing them to regularly send taxes. Soon he started receiving taxes from Hindustan, China, Rome and other neighbouring places. He ruled his kingdom wisely, and like his predecessors established a city by the name Zarnush.

Eskandar

Eskandar becomes the Roman Kaisar :

After the death of Philkus, Eskandar occupied the Roman throne and ruled justly and wisely. A philosopher named Arastalis was his administrative, military and personal advisor.

When Iranian representatives went to collect taxes from Rome after the death of Philkus, Eskandar curtly told them, "Henceforth no taxes will be paid. Let it be known to king Dara that the hen laying golden eggs is now dead."

Eskandar marches to Iran :

Eskandar was a very ambitious and adventurous person. He decided to travel across the globe, and make the world his own. He set off with an army and conquered Egypt. From there he collected great wealth and soldiers and set off towards Iran.

When Dara came to know that Eskandar was coming towards Iran, he gathered an army from Istakhra and marched off towards Rome to intercept him. Both the armies camped close by near the Euphrates river. Eskandar was not clear as to his strategy, and so in order to gather information about the strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian army, he went into their camp, disguised as his own ambassador.

Eskandar in disguise :

When Dara came to know that a Roman ambassador had come to his camp, he welcomed him and asked, "Say, what brings you here?"

Eskandar replied, "Greetings to you from the Roman Kaisar, O noble Iranian king. My lord sends the message that he has no intention to fight you. He just wants to pass through your country as he desires to see the world. However, he says that if you stop him he will have to fight you, however big your army. So, O worthy king! It is up to you to decide whether you want to fight or let us pass peacefully."

The Iranian king was impressed not only by the style, manners and speech of the ambassador, but also dazzled by his radiance and majestic personality. He reminded him of his own father Darab, so he asked, "Young man, you seem to be of noble birth, aren't you Eskandar himself?" "No, no," Eskandar laughed off. "In our country we do not have the tradition of the Kaisar going to give messages. He has several intelligent men at his disposal to do that work for him. I am just one such man."

Dara was so impressed by the young man, that he asked him and his associates to stay for the evening and hosted a lavish dinner in their honour. After having food, Eskandar exhibited a strange behaviour by collecting empty wine cups after drinking the wine thereof. He did this, since he wanted to keep the cups as a souvenir of his triumphant sojourn into the Iranian camp in disguise. The wine server drew the king's attention to this strange behaviour. On inquiry, Eskandar cleverly said that it was the custom of his land that the ambassador should collect all the empty wine glasses, however, if the Iranian custom required otherwise, he would put them back. King Dara was amused at this reply and he ordered a wine glass filled with precious stones to be given to the ambassador.

Eskandar's identity is revealed :

Just then, Iranian representatives who had gone to the Roman court to collect taxes, returned to their king. One of them immediately recognised Eskandar as the new Roman Kaisar who had insulted them in his court. Accordingly, he informed king Dara that the ambassador was none other than the Roman Kaisar himself who had not only insulted and driven them out of the court, but had even insulted the Iranian king. He had to be very brave to himself come into the enemy's den. He must surely have come to gather information about the Iranian army and its war strategies.

Eskandar manages to escape :

Eskandar, who was a shrewd man, recognised the Iranian representatives. When he saw one of them whispering in the ears of the king, he at once realised that his game was up. Before anybody could realise, he beckoned his soldiers and they slipped out, taking advantage of twilight.

Dara immediately ordered the Roman ambassador to be arrested, but to his utter dismay, he had already escaped. When Dara realised that his archenemy had slipped away right from under his nose, he dispatched a thousand soldiers behind him, but Eskandar and his men had managed to slip away in the darkness and the dejected Iranian soldiers had to return empty handed.

Eskandar returned to his camp and was given a rousing reception by his warriors and advisors on his successful espionage mission. He had brought back with him the wine glass filled with jewels which the Iranian king had presented him. He informed his commander that the Iranian army was smaller than they had expected and they had no reason to worry. They should not lose any time in launching an attack.

Dara too realised that Eskandar may launch an attack any time, so he prepared his army

and went across the Euphrates to attack the Romans. When Eskandar learnt that the Iranian army was approaching he sent his own army to intercept it.

Three battles :

The armies met mid-way and a battle started between them, which lasted for seven days. On the eighth day, a sandstorm erupted, which blinded the Iranian soldiers and they had to retreat. Eskandar's army pursued the Iranian soldiers and massacred them till they crossed the Euphrates river. The Roman army then returned back to its camp.

The Iranian king took help from the armies of subordinate Iranian and Turanian kings, and prepared for a month to launch a fresh attack. The renewed Iranian army crossed the Euphrates and attacked the Roman army, which too had refreshed and replenished itself.

The battle went on for three days, at the end of which the fortunes of the Iranian armies started diminishing. Eskandar once again scored a resounding victory over the Iranian who started retreating. Dara was saddened on seeing his retreating soldiers, but he resolved to continue the battle. However, after some time he realised that he was needlessly sacrificing his loyal soldiers in a losing battle, and decided to retreat.

Eskandar once again replenished his army with the clothes, armoury, weapons and treasury left behind by the Iranian soldiers.

The Iranian king returned to his capital at Istakhra, and called a meeting of his advisors, local chiefs and commanders. He informed them of the precarious condition their country was facing and asked them whether they wanted to give a fight to the Romans or surrender tamely to them. All of them unanimously agreed to fight back till their last breath.

With this assurance, Dara once again started mobilising his forces. When Eskandar became aware of this, he took his army from Iraq to Iran. The Iranian army too was taken from Istakhra to meet the Roman army. Both the armies were considerably bigger this time. They engaged in a fierce battle, but once again the Romans emerged victorious, and king Dara had to flee to Kerman.

Eskandar decided to follow him this time and put an end to the Iranian might once and for all. He went to the capital city of Istakhra, which was the pride of Pars, looted its treasures and distributed them amongst his soldiers. The citizens who surrendered to him were pardoned, and those who opposed him were imprisoned.

In Kerman, a thoroughly defeated Dara once again consulted his advisors and local chiefs. But, this time they were utterly demoralised. They neither had the strength nor the means to fight again. They advised their king to surrender to Eskandar, and write a letter to him to that effect.

Dara writes a letter of surrender :

Dara wrote a letter to the Roman King and dispatched it through a swift camel-rider to Eskandar who was in Istakhra. In the letter he offered to be friends with him, and also requested him to send back the Iranian queens and other ladies of his harem. In return, he assured him of his assistance in all his future campaigns and also promised to give all the his ancestral treasures to him.

Dara changes his mind :

When Eskandar received the letter, he felt pity for the Iranian king and sent a favourable reply acceding to all his requests. However, after sending the letter, king Dara changed his mind, as he did not like the idea of submitting to an alien king. He decided to fight back taking help of his allies. He wrote a letter to Fur, the king of Hindustan asking him to provide help so that he could attack Eskandar.

When Eskandar came to know of Dara's plans, he was infuriated. He launched an attack on Dara, who had to defend himself with an utterly demoralised and disinterested army. The soldiers, instead of fighting and defending, meekly surrendered to the Romans seeking their protection. Dara was stunned by the behaviour of his soldiers. He had no option but to flee the battlefield with about three hundred of his trusted soldiers.

Dara killed by his own men :

When two of Dara's commanders, Mahyar and Januspar saw their king fleeing, they had a wicked plan in their mind. They realised that their king will not recover from these repeated blows, so in order to seek favour from the Roman Kaiser, they decided to kill their own king.

The two traitors followed their king when he was fleeing, and in cover of darkness stabbed him with a dagger. They then hurriedly went to Eskandar and proudly proclaimed that they had slain his enemy, the king of Iran.

Eskandar was disgusted on hearing this. He had nothing but scorn for the people who had committed this cowardly and treacherous act. He asked the traitors to lead him to that place.

As soon as Eskandar saw a bleeding Dara, he got down from his horse, cradled his head in his lap and with tears in his eyes started soothing him, "Don't worry, dear one, no harm will come to you. I will call the best medical attendants from Hindustan and Rome and they will soon heal your wounds."

Amidst sobs, Eskandar continued, "You have to get well soon. Both of us belong to the same family, so why should we fight? I will hand over your crown and throne to you and go away from your land. I will make you sit on a royal embellished elephant and take you back to your capital. I will punish all those who have committed the heinous crime of attacking their own king."

The sun sets on Kayanian empire :

Dara was greatly touched at the love and affection shown by Eskandar. With great efforts he said, "Talk not to me of crown and throne, for I know my end is near. I now want to give this one message to my people. I had everything man could ask for, but when providence was not in my favour I became helpless and fell prey to mean people. Hence, tell my people to always spare a thought for death when they are dealing with anything in life."

Eskandar was deeply moved by the graveness in Dara's voice, and sobbed at the sad plight of his half brother. Seeing him, Dara said, "Cry not, for your tears can not get me back my life, nor can it change the course of providence. If at all you want to do anything for me, heed my last words and act accordingly." When Eskandar nodded, Dara continued, "Take care of my family and my children. Take my daughter Roshnak (Rokhshan) in wedlock and make her happy. Who knows, her son may restore the lost glory of the Iranian empire." With these words ended the life of the last of the Kayanian kings.

Eskandar had a majestic Dokhma prepared for Dara and gave him a royal funeral.

Mahiyar and Januspar are punished :

As soon as Eskandar finished with Dara's funeral, he punished the two murderers of the late Iranian king. He ordered two huge stakes to be built, and had Mahiyar and Januspar impaled on them. As if that punishment was not enough, he ordered them to be stoned to death.

Eskandar becomes the king of Iran :

The Iranian people were greatly impressed on seeing Eskandar's devotion and love for their king, and accepted him as their ruler. Eskandar also had letters sent to all kings who were Iranian subordinates, asked them to accept him as their king, and no harm would come to them.

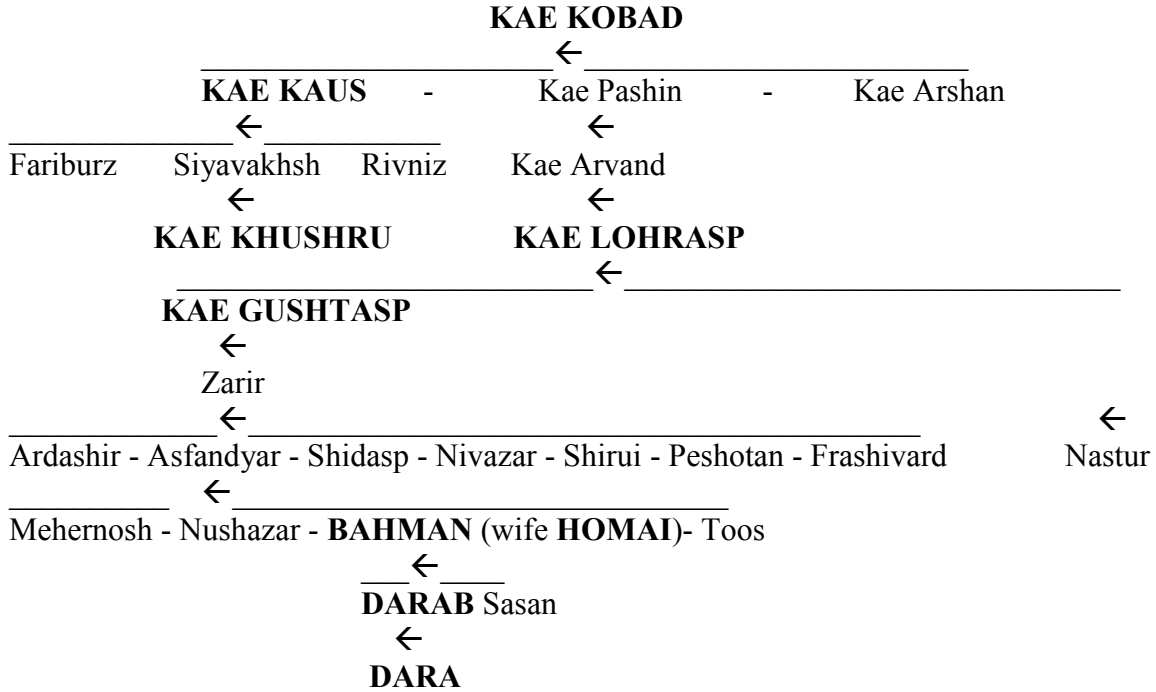
He then occupied the Iranian throne, put the crown on his head and had his own coins struck, thus bringing an end to the glorious Kayanian empire.

☆ *Family Trees*

Family Trees of well-known kings paladins.

Kayanian kings :

The names in bold and capital letters indicate the persons who became kings.



Iranian Paladins :

Kersasp

←

Nariman

←

Sam

←

Zal

←

Rustam – Zavareh

←

Sohrab - Faramarz

Kaveh

←

Karan Keshvad Milad

←

Gudarz Gurgin

←

Rohham - Hazir - Shidush - Behram - Giv(married Banugoshasp d/o Rustam) - Nasteh

←

Bizan - Shirui - Ardeshir

Navdar

←

Toos - Gastaham

←

Zarasp Rivniz(son in law)

Turanian Viseh :

Viseh

			←		
Kalbad	Homan	Piran	Nastihan	Lahhak	Frashivard
		←			
		Ruintan			

Turanian king Afrasiyab :

Faridun (Iranian king of the Peshdadan dynasty)

←

Tur

←

Pashang

←

Afrasiyab - Karsivaz - Agreras - Pilsam

←

Jehan - Kara Khan (eldest) - Gave-gordigar - Surkheh - Shideh

←

Arjasp - Kohram - Andariman

★ *Pronunciation Of Proper Nouns*

Plain words denote personal names, words with * denote place, words with ** denote other proper nouns.

WRITTEN AS		PRONOUNCED AS
Afrasiyab	-	Afraasiyaab
Akvan	-	Akvaan
Alan*	-	Alaan
Almas*	-	Almaas
Alwa	-	Alwaa
Amu*	-	Aamu
Andirman	-	Andirmaan
Arjasp	-	Arjaasp
Armani*	-	Armaani
Arash	-	Aarash
Aspandyar	-	Aspandyaar
Aveh	-	Aaveh
Azad Sarva**	-	Aazaad Sarva
Azadeh	-	Aazaadeh
Azar Abadagan-		Aazar Aabaadagaan
Azar Baizan*	-	Aazar Baizaan
Baghdad*	-	Baghdaad
Barbary*	-	Baarbary
Barman	-	Barmaan
Bazur	-	Baazur
Behafrid	-	Behaafrid
Behram	-	Behraam
Behzad	-	Behzaad
Bidad	-	Bidaad
Bokhara*	-	Bokhaaraa
Burab	-	Buraab
Chach*	-	Chaach
Chaganiye*	-	Chagaaniye
Cheherazad	-	Cheheraazaad
Dahestan*	-	Dahestaan
Damur	-	Daamur
Darab	-	Daaraab
Darazdast	-	Daraazdast
Esfahan*	-	Esfahaan
Faramarz	-	Faraamarz
Fargar	-	Fargaar
Farhad	-	Farhaad
Farrokhzad	-	Farrokhzaad
Gahar	-	Gahaar

Gahaniye*	-	Gahaaniye
Garchegan*	-	Garchegaan
Gerami	-	Geraami
Gilan*	-	Gilaan
Gorazeh	-	Goraazeh
Gorgsar	-	Gorgsaar
Gumbadan(Mt.)*-		Gumbadaan
Gurgan*	-	Gurgaan
Guranshah	-	Guraanshaah
Gushtasp	-	Gushtaasp
Hamavan (Mt.)* -		Hamaavan
Homai	-	Homaai
Homan	-	Homaan
Iliyas	-	Iliyaas
Jam-i-geti numay** -		Jaam-i-geti numaay
Jang-e-Shavran-		Jang-e-Shaavraan
Januspar	-	Jaanuspaar
Jaranjas	-	Jaranjaas
Kabul	-	Kaabul
Kae Kaus	-	Kae Kaaus
Kae Kobad	-	Kae Kobaad
Kafur	-	Kaafur
Kahan*	-	Kashaan
Kalat*	-	Kalaat
Kalbad	-	Kalbaad
Kamus	-	Kaamus
Kanabad*	-	Kanaabaad
Kara Khan	-	Karaa Khaan
Karan	-	Kaaran
Kargsar*	-	Kargsaar
Kaserud*	-	Kaaserud
Kat*	-	Kaat
Katabun	-	Kataabun
Katayun	-	Kataayun
Kaveh	-	Kaaveh
Kerman*	-	Kermaan
Kersasp	-	Kersaasp
Keshvad	-	Keshvaad
Khakan	-	Khaakaan
Kharrad	-	Kharraad
Kharzam*	-	Khaarzam
Khashash	-	Khashaash
Khazar*	-	Khaazar
Khorasan*	-	Khoraasaan
Khotan*	-	Khotaan

Khuzan	-	Khuzaan
Khuziyan*	-	Khuziyaan
Kohistan	-	Kohistaan
Kohram	-	Kohraam
Ladan*	-	Laadan
Lahhak	-	Lahhaak
Lohrasp	-	Lohraasp
Manushan	-	Manushaan
Machin*	-	Maachin
Mahyar	-	Maahyaar
Makran*	-	Makraan
Mazandaran	-	Maazandaraan
Mehras	-	Mehraas
Mehrab	-	Mehraab
Mehras	-	Mehraas
Milad	-	Milaad
Nahid	-	Naahid
Namkhast	-	Naamkhaast
Narmpay	-	Narmpaay
Nastar	-	Nastaar
Nishapur*	-	Nishaapur
Nivazar	-	Nivazaar
Noshdaru**	-	Noshdaaru
Nushazar	-	Nushaazar
Panjab*	-	Panjaab
Pars*	-	Paars
Piran	-	Piraan
Puladvand	-	Pulaadvand
Raibad(forest)*-		Raibaad
Rashnavad	-	Rashnavaad
Rohham	-	Rohhaam
Sagsar*	-	Sagsaar
Saklab*	-	Saklaab
Samaknan*	-	Samaknaan
Samangan*	-	Samangaan
Sabbah	-	Sabbaah
Sepehran	-	Sepehraan
Shagad	-	Shagaad
Shamiran*	-	Shamiraan
Shammakh	-	Shammaakh
Sistan*	-	Sistan
Siyavakhsh	-	Siyaavakhsh
Sodabeh	-	Sodaabeh
Sohrab	-	Sohraab
Tarkhan	-	Tarkhaan

Tehmina	-	Tehminaa
Tokhar	-	Tokhaar
Turan*	-	Turaan
Vishtaspa	-	Vishtaaspa
Yazdarokh**	-	Yaazdarokh
Zabul*	-	Zaabul
Zal	-	Zaal
Zavareh	-	Zavaareh
Zohra	-	Zohraa